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Beating Burnout

New Research Shows Drumming Reduces Burnout and Saves Money



When Marcia Schick, an L.C.S.W. from Vero Beach, Florida read an article on drumming in *Paradigm Magazine* (Winter, 2004), she had an epiphany. According to Marcia, “The article referred to Dr. Barry Bittman’s first experience of a drum circle at a medical conference. He stated, ‘I’d never seen seven hundred healthcare professionals working together successfully!’ The article summed up exactly what our staff needed; community, self-expression, mind, body, and spirit care in an activity that is fun, powerful, and accessible to all people!”

Marcia immediately hunted down the referenced Web site and enrolled in the next *HealthRHYTHMS®* group drumming training program, just four days later in northern California. Within just two weeks of reading the article, she was successfully leading drum circles for the staff at The Center For Emotional and Behavioral Health.

Shortly after *Paradigm* reported on the first biological study on the immune system benefits of group drumming, exciting new research was published on the value of drumming for teambuilding and stress reduction for staff. Featured on CNN Headline News, magazines including *Prevention*, *Spirituality and Health*, *Occupational Health*, and over one hundred newspapers nation-wide, this study has generated an enthusiastic response, indicative of the growing need for effective, evidence-based staff wellness programs.

What is Burnout All About?

Burnout is defined as “psychological exhaustion and diminished efficiency resulting from overwork or prolonged exposure to stress.” (Webster). Employee burnout is a critical problem in psychiatric, addictions, long-term care and medical treatment facilities, which causes high and costly levels of turnover. Data in long-term care alone indicates employee turnover ranges between 40 to 100 percent annually. Surprisingly, industry surveys show that emotional factors, rather than economic ones, account for 81.7 percent of employees’ decisions to stay or leave, indicating that turnover can be significantly reduced by improving the emotional quality of the team.

Beyond these definitions and staggering figures, a report by Worksource Oregon indicates that addiction counselors face even higher levels of stress due to budgetary cuts, high incidence of co-occurring mental disorders of the clients they treat (80 percent), and time management challenges. Treating dually-diagnosed and addicted patients holds its own unique challenges. While statistics on successful recovery and maintaining sobriety are daunting, (ranging from 5-30 percent according to the Baldwin Research Institute, Inc.), staff may feel frustrated with re-admissions and relapses, in addition to clients who may be verbally abusive and frequently test authority.

Research Findings

Published in the Fall/Winter 2003 issue of *Advances in Mind-Body Medicine*, Bittman et al demonstrated that drumming could significantly reduce burnout and improve mood using a six-week program of Recreational Music-making (a protocol that included group

drumming complemented by a Yamaha Clavinova keyboard). According to neurologist and primary investigator Barry Bittman, M.D., medical director of the Mind-Body Wellness Center in Meadville, PA, “This is the first study to address the practical human-resource applications of Recreational Music-making in a specific and quantifiable manner.” *The study showed the following results:*

- Significant reduction in burnout based upon the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)
- Significant reduction in Total Mood Disturbance by 46 percent based upon the Profile of Mood States (POMS)
- Sustained effect six weeks after sessions ended, with an increased reduction in Total Mood Disturbance of 62 percent.
- Estimated annual cost savings to institution of \$89,100 by reducing staff turnover.

Cost-analysis figures were projected by an independent economic review agency based upon an 18.3 percent reduction in employee turnover. Actual reductions in turnover at Wesbury United Methodist Retirement Community in Meadville, PA, where the study took place, exceeded the research projections. Researchers chose long term care employees due to the high stress levels of treating confused and sometimes combative patients coupled with the challenges of nursing shortages.



Wesbury United Methodist Retirement Community

During the study, researchers asked 112 employees (meeting in groups of 12) to participate in drumming circles for one hour per week for six weeks. Participants came from all parts of the facility, and included nurses, dietary workers, accountants, administrators and housekeepers. Before and after the six-week sessions, participants completed two scales to assess mood and burnout; the Profile Of Mood States (POMS) and the Maslach Burnout Inventory, (MBI) designed to measure healthcare workers’ burnout levels. The MBI includes three subscales; Emotional Exhaustion (EE), Depersonalization (DP), and an inverted scale that measures Personal Accomplishment (PA).

Bittman’s research team just published another study sponsored by the International Music Products Association (NAMM) conducted at Allegany College of Western Maryland with first year nursing students. Similar results included a reduction in burnout, improvement in mood, and economic impact projections potential savings of \$16,800 for nursing programs and \$322,000 for an acute care hospital.

HealthRHYTHMS® Group Drumming for Staff

“The drumming created an incredible sense of teamwork. I could feel the power of everyone working together.”—Lothar Delgotto, L.C.S.W., Kaiser Permanente Hospice, Pasadena, CA.

The one-hour *HealthRHYTHMS*® group empowerment drumming program incorporates proven health strategies into a music-making experience that is fun, enlivening, and accessible. The goal is not to



teach drum techniques, but to reduce stress and burnout within the workforce of any institution. Even individuals who have never drummed or played an instrument before discover success in making music and working together with colleagues to create a common beat.

In the drumming sessions, participants performed a series of exercises, including beating the drum to the rhythm of their own name, copying the rhythm of others' names, representing their feelings via drumbeats, playing along to music, and discussing ongoing stresses with the group, if they so chose. Referred to as the "percussion discussion," the research team gave each group two questions each week, *including the following examples*:

- What do you find particularly rewarding about your job?
- What do you find particularly challenging or stressful about your job or co-workers?
- What does your own personal pressure sound like, and where does it originate?
- Can you change its (your) tune?

Each participant was given the opportunity to answer the question on his or her drum. Incredible transformation ensued as the level of trust grew and individuals opened up, ultimately building understanding and camaraderie, all within the context of a fun, safe, and supportive group.

Overcoming Obstacles

"After rave reviews from our first drumming session, SPARC is planning to offer this program to all our staff." —Kathie Wozniak, Director, SPARC Developmental Training Center, Springfield, Illinois

While there may be the initial challenge of convincing administrators to believe, invest, and institute such an innovative program as group drumming for employees, strong research coupled with economic need is creating a pathway for music into healthcare. Indeed, administrators are searching for solutions that are sustainable, accessible to all staff, and affordable. The demonstrated budget saving element of the research on group drumming for employee burnout engenders support from key decision makers in organizations looking to increase employee retention and maintain a healthy workforce, even in the face of the challenges of the treatment profession.

Of course, there may still be staff resistance. The answer is immediately involving people in the experience. Almost 100 percent of the time, they overcome any performance fears or doubt within the first fifteen minutes; a remarkable learning curve compared to other teambuilding activities.

Beating Stress

"My colleagues and I work in a very stressful environment. Our staff needed a way to release stress and support each other. The drumming accomplished both!" —Marcia Schick, L.C.S.W.

After Marcia took the *HealthRHYTHMS*® group drumming training program, she immediately began leading drum circles to alleviate staff burnout and build camaraderie at the Center for Emotional and Behavioral Health at Indian River Memorial Hospital in Vero Beach,

Florida. "Initially I was a little intimidated by not having any formal musical training," stated Marcia, "but I quickly learned that was actually an asset as I would be trying to persuade my fellow employees of their ability, even if they had no formal training! I bought rhythm instruments and some drums while in California and quickly began making more purchases, so I could get this activity started."

Marcia offered morning (7:30AM for night workers finishing their shift) and evening drum sessions for six weeks. According to Marcia, "Initially, some people were rather hesitant but what seemed to bring the most interest was when they actually saw me moving drums from one room to another. We invited all staff members — administration, house keeping, mental health technicians, nursing, admission and referral staff, discharge planning, doctors, case management, therapists, and administrative assistants. Now, we have a core group who continue to attend the drum circles the third Wednesday afternoon each month. They repeatedly express their gratitude for the unity, fun and stress relief they are experiencing."

When people ask Marcia why she decided to bring drum circles to the staff, she replies, "My personal mission is to bring fun, stress relief, unity, and connection through a non academic activity for a marvelous group of loving, committed professionals who are excellent at what they do!"



Getting Started

To learn more about group drumming and healthcare, visit www.remo.com/health, for a fascinating collection of over thirty articles written by doctors, counselors, and music therapists. In addition, the site features the latest research and a dialogue board where individuals can discuss useful tips and interventions for various populations.

Barry Bittman, M.D. and Christine Stevens teach *HealthRHYTHMS*® facilitation-training programs. The intensive training program that is offered several times a year travels to various locations across the USA and Japan. For more information, contact healthrhythms@remo.com, or call (661) 294-5655. ▼

Christine Stevens received dual-masters degrees in music therapy and social work from Colorado State University. As Director of Music Therapy and Wellness Programs at Remo Drum Company, Ms. Stevens develops research, teaches trainings, and offers keynote presentations on drumming for self-care, health and wellness. Her first book, *The ART and HEART of Drum Circles*, published by Hal Leonard is available at Borders Books, Amazon.com, and most music stores. For more information, visit the Web site www.ubdrumcircles.com.



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