



Perspective
**Harps of
Comfort at
Froedtert
Hospital:**

A Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

by Jennifer Mackinnon, MD, MM, Jennifer Hollis, CM-Th, MDiv, and Julia Reimann

[Harps of Comfort](#) began with a tweet. On March 31, 2020, Dr. Jennifer Mackinnon of Froedtert Hospital and The Medical College of Wisconsin reached out to music–thanatologist and author Jennifer Hollis on Twitter, saying, “I am a harpist and doctor. I want to see how we can bring music into the ICUs when patients are dying alone. Let’s work together and see if we can make this happen.”

Shortly thereafter, we brought a group of harpists – all highly trained palliative musicians – together to meet weekly on Zoom to discuss this possibility. These harpists come from all across the United States, Canada, and Australia, and many have decades of experience offering live music in medical settings.

After months of planning, we began playing for patients at Froedtert Hospital on Monday, September 21, 2020. Each week, two harpists are on–call Monday through Friday, 12noon – 5:00 pm to play music for isolated patients with COVID-19. Loved ones are welcome to join in via the online platform.

Harps of Comfort is already having an impact on patient care, according to Jennifer Popies, MS, RN, CCRN-K, ACNS-BC, Clinical Nurse Specialist in the CVICU. “A patient’s wife had stated that she felt that the Harps of Comfort visit helped lower her husband’s blood pressure, and she herself appreciated the music – she made sure that each day they played – and she was here at the

hospital – that she was in the room the whole time for it, as she found it comforting as well,” she said. “Still another patient had been very restless, anxious and short of breath for much of the shift; he agreed to try the Harps of Comfort playing for him and the bedside RN reported that the patient fell asleep within five minutes of them starting to play because he was so relaxed!”

Thanks to initial funding from [Circle of Love](#), a music–thanatology nonprofit, the harpists receive an honorarium for their work. Administrative tasks are currently performed by volunteers and a Harvard Divinity School graduate student. Harps of Comfort is developing a fundraising plan and hopes to continue its work with no interruption to care.

Music can benefit not only the patient, but also their loved ones, the nurses, and other staff who care for them. The harpists themselves have also been impacted. “It has been an amazing experience for me to be able to bring comfort and support to COVID–19 patients with my harp and voice, and to see how close the virtual platform brings us to the patient's bedside. It is like being right there with them,” said Bonita Wood, CMP, RN, BMus. “This is truly a unique privilege to be able to serve the patients, their family and health care staff in this way.”

Jennifer Mackinnon, MD, is an Associate Professor of Medicine (General Internal Medicine) at MCW. Feel free to contact her at jmackinnon@mcw.edu or for any ideas/resources for funding opportunities.

*Jennifer L. Hollis, CM–Th, MDiv, is a writer, music–thanatologist and the author of *Music at the End of Life: Easing the Pain and Preparing the Passage*. You can connect with her at www.jenniferhollis.com*

Julia Reimann is a second year Master of Divinity (MDiv) student at Harvard Divinity School studying spiritual care and counseling.

Elizabeth Markell, CM-Th, plays for Froedtert Hospital patients from her home in Oregon.

