

# Music as medicine: Carts bring more than just music to hospitalized kids

by Jennifer Willis

Music filters down the hallway, grabbing kids' attention. The excitement is palpable as the brightly decorated cart comes rolling down the corridor. Even the adults stop and smile. Some major fun is about to be had.

But this isn't the ice cream cart, and these aren't regular kids. They're in the hospital, surrounded by monitors and tubes and endless testing. But the Music Rx cart is coming.

The "world's coolest musical cart" — designed in partnership by Nike, Herman Miller and the Portland-based Children's Cancer Association — holds 100 musical instruments, 10 iPods, song writing software and a 30-inch LCD screen for playing music videos. Emblazoned with the slogan "Music is my medicine" — and accompanied by a trained music therapist — the cart brings peace, cheer and much needed distraction to hospital bedsides.

"The kids have responded so positively," says Emily Hoffmann, Director of the Music Rx Program for CCA.

Kids can take musical instruments out of the cart to play, or "check out" iPods — just like borrowing a book or CD from the library. The cart's music videos are very popular, and appeal to kids of all ages, with selec-

tions ranging from High School Musical videos and Radio Disney concerts to hip hop, rap and alternative music videos.

An Apple MacBook complete with GarageBand, a software program that lets kids create their own music on the computer, powers each Music Rx cart.

"Kids are just really into technology these days," Hoffmann says. "It just really correlates perfectly with what kids are interested in, getting to walk up to the music cart and getting to actually play on a computer and create music."

CCA has placed music carts in area hospitals since 1996, but the Music Rx carts are a blazing leap forward in design and functionality.

"We really couldn't have done it without Nike and Herman Miller," says Hoffmann. "All of the folks that worked on the music carts, from the engineers to the model makers, actually built those carts on their own time during breaks and after-hours."

Funding for the carts has come from grants, private donations and CCA fundraising events.

There are currently two Music Rx carts in Portland, serving children in Legacy Emanuel Hospital and Doernbecher Children's Hospital. CCA does not charge hospitals for use of the carts, and also provides music therapists to work with



Darian King (above) and Morgan Newkirk (right) are grateful users of the Music Rx cart at Legacy Emanuel Children's Hospital.

Photos courtesy Children's Cancer Association



the children.

"It takes the human element to make it work," says Peggy Adams, Child Life Specialist at Legacy Emanuel. She enthusiastically describes the many different options the Music Rx cart offers her youngest patients, from banging on percussion instruments to watching music videos. "They have free choice. In a hospital, they don't get a lot of free choice."

Adams describes one patient, a little boy, who at the age of 3 has been in and out of the hospital most of his life.

"He has a trach, so you often can't hear his voice," she says. "He can't produce sound very well, but through the musical instrument he can be very loud, very powerful."

Hoffmann, who is also a board-certified music therapist, says having music available helps relieve anxiety and distracts kids from pain.

"They can use music to help them relax, help them to fall asleep, or help them not to think about a treatment that's going on," she says. "When you give that aspect of something fun, something for them to look forward to, it can really transform

their entire hospital experience — from something where they're dreading going, to something where they actually may be looking forward to it, which is pretty incredible."

But the kids aren't the only ones benefiting from the Music Rx program. Hospital staff, too, say it makes for a more pleasant experience.

"It's a pretty sterile environment, without the music," says Adams. "There's lot of monitors and beeps and very clinical sounding things."

But when the music cart rolls out, people come alive. Everything slows down, becoming calmer and more relaxed. Patients and staff alike stop in the hallways to watch and listen as the carts roll by.

Adams says she also enjoys the Harmonic Hallways component of the Music Rx program, in which volunteer musicians play live music in hospital corridors.

Some staff even plan their breaks around the musicians' schedules, so they can sit and enjoy the music while decompressing from the stress of their work.

With both the music carts and the live musicians, Adams says, "there's a connection to real music. That is phenomenal."

Hoffmann says calmer and happier staff means calmer and happier patients.

"When we roll the cart in, you can watch it transform the unit," she says. "I think when you take all those benefits — the bonding and the morale and the reduced pain and anxiety — all those things lead to a better overall experience."

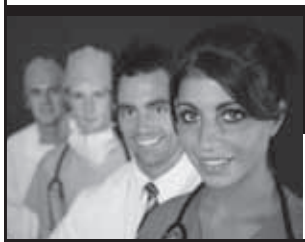
*For more information about the carts and the Children's Cancer Association visit [www.childrencancerassociation.org](http://www.childrencancerassociation.org).*

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