

Music Could Help Dementia Sufferers

Music could succeed in unlocking memories for dementia sufferers where conversation has failed, Australian researchers say.

Dr Felicity Baker, a senior lecturer from the University of Queensland (UQ) School of Music, says people with dementia commonly suffer short term memory loss and lose the ability to interact with their partner - meaning their relationship suffers.

But a song from their youth may be able to jog memories they thought were lost forever, and get couples talking again.

"Thousands of people care for partners with dementia and take on a lot of burden, which means they are more prone to anxiety and depression," Dr Baker said on Tuesday.

"But there's been some recent evidence that says it's actually the breakdown in the intimacy in the relationship that is the biggest cause of stress for them.

"That's because the person with dementia often has a demeanour where they don't communicate much and they just sit there and they are quite passive.

"The idea of my project is ... to tap into the memories of people with dementia as a way of sharing positive experiences and trying to maintain some level of satisfaction with the relationship."

Dr Baker is looking for 100 volunteer couples who will let music therapists visit their homes over the next year to 18 months, to show them how to use old songs and dancing to strike up a conversation.

She said it was not just a matter of putting on a CD or an old vinyl record, but teaching the spouse about what music to choose, how to interpret the responses of the dementia sufferer, what kind of questions to ask them and the conversations to initiate.

The project will be conducted in the Brisbane area with Associate Professor Nancy Pachana from UQ's School of Psychology and Associate Professor Denise Grocke from The University of Melbourne.

The team hopes to include couples from various cultural backgrounds, and expects the data collection process to take about two years.

Courtesy: <http://www.globalaging.org/health/world/2008/music.htm>