

# Health problems and background music in a GP's waiting room - a plea to doctors and practice managers\*

The NHS is spending thousands of pounds of NHS money on providing music, radio or live television in waiting rooms and reception areas. GPs surgeries, in particular, are following a worrying trend that, if a "survey" says the majority of patients want music in the waiting room, it is acceptable to play it. Such surveys have no place in a medical environment. If you are on a plane and one passenger has a peanut allergy, it doesn't matter if the rest of the passengers want to eat peanuts; they have to respect the needs of the one passenger who can't.

In the same way, a minority of patients have medical conditions which make background music intolerable. These include people with high blood pressure, sufferers from ME, people on the autistic spectrum, and people with hearing problems.

Below are quotations from people who suffer from these conditions. Most people find it very difficult to complain in a medical environment. These quotations could be what some of your patients would like to say to you if they had the opportunity.

If you are a doctor or practice manager and play music in your surgery waiting room, please read them and reconsider your policy.

## **Raises blood pressure**

*"My GP's waiting room has background music. By the time I get to see a doctor my blood pressure has gone through the roof, I'm tense and I just want to get out of there. Why do they do this to me?"*

"Unwanted music can raise blood-pressure to dangerous levels. I have clear evidence of this" (quote from a doctor)

*"How can anyone get a true reading of my blood pressure if I'm being disturbed by the sort of noise that makes me want to break something? I've noticed a consistent difference between readings taken in a muzak-soiled atmosphere in hospital and in blessed silence in my doctor's surgery"*

"my gp had to check my blood pressure twice because it was so high. I had been driven mad by the so called music in the waiting room. He was amazed!"

## **ME sufferers**

*"Piped music is played at my GP's surgery. I have ME and cannot tolerate music or background noise, it makes me ill"*

“People with ME often suffer from hyperacuity and sensory overload, and background music can really exacerbate symptoms already present”

*“As an M.E. sufferer one of my symptoms is noise sensitivity so music I cannot escape from is actively damaging to my health”*

“Having ME for 8 years, this was a complete nightmare! I do hope something will be done to restore silence and sanity in our NHS”

*“People like me, with ME/CFS, and there are about 250,000 of us in the UK, are very likely to have an acute sensitivity to sound and find it very difficult to concentrate on the task in hand if there is also music playing. I myself find what little energy i have drain away completely which means i cannot do anything at all until i can save up some more”*

## **Autistic spectrum**

“My son is autistic and hypersensitive to sounds, he finds music particularly distressing and we sometimes have to resort to eardefenders to keep him calm. For the rest of the population music is only calming if it is to your taste - otherwise it's just irritating noise. You wouldn't forcefeed people food or drink so why forcefeed us noise”

*“Muzak is a stressor, and in the case of highly sensitive people or those on the autistic spectrum, a major cause of distress. No one should have this imposed on them by health care services, who ought to know better than to follow the mindless trends set by commerce”*

“For children and adults on the autistic spectrum, it must be hellish”

*“My son is autistic and is hypersensitive to noise, piped music causes him to become distressed. I see no reason why he, I and in fact anyone should be exposed to someone else's choice of music against our will, in a public place”*

## **Hard of hearing**

“People who have hearing impairment, especially if they wear aids, find background music particularly distressing because they cannot filter it out”

*“I have a hearing disability and cannot 'deaf out' unwanted sounds as some people seem to. This means broadcast 'music' interferes with my conversations - and usually leaves me with headaches”*

“...it can be particularly distressing to the hearing impaired since they have particular difficulty in understanding what is said to them or in hearing their name called”

*“It's absolute torture for many people to have to listen to someone else's taste in music or broadcasting and to be helpless to escape from it. Also, it makes life so much stressful if you are hard of hearing and trying to converse with your visitor/companion/staff”*

“It is even worse if one suffers from hyperacusis as I do. This especially applies if you are trying to hear what someone such as a doctor or a visitor is saying”

*"I loathe canned music as I have severe tinnitus"*

## **Misaphonia sufferers**

"As a sufferer of misaphonia, all background music gives me high blood pressure and makes me angry and aggressive"

*"Misophonia is a real and very distressing condition. It causes me to become very anxious when when I am unable to escape low level noise or 'background' music. I am not alone, but am articulate and can usually ask for such noise to be reduced or switched off. Many patients are unable to do so in situations in which they may already be dis-empowered. Please do consider this very serious issue and order the banning of such background noise"*

## **Excuse that you need background music for confidentiality**

"Medical services sometimes say that music helps to preserve confidentiality, but this is nonsense: everyone talks more loudly in order to be heard over the top of the music"

*"If confidentiality was a serious concern white noise would do better than imposing music"*

"'Music to mask the telephone conversation of the receptionist' is no justification. Confidentiality can easily be preserved in other ways"

## **Further quotes**

*"A doctor's waiting room is not like a cafe or a bar - one does not have the choice to go to another, or not go at all - one is obliged to by medical necessity. To be forced in such circumstances to listen to music not to one's liking is a violation of one's personal rights at a time when many people may be feeling fearful or vulnerable. Silence is not a problem to be rectified, but essential to our wellbeing in a pressurised and increasingly noisy world"*

"Unsolicited music is very stressful and counter productive for sick people. It raises blood pressure and impairs the immune system, not to mention the psychological suffering it causes" (quote from a doctor)

*"If even only one person finds it offensive or irritating, it should not be forced on them"*

"I am disabled. I am often sitting waiting for treatment or consultations. I find the music bothers me. It is usually something that I would never listen to by choice. If it is intended to relax me then it does the opposite"

*"To force passive listening on people who can't get away is like puffing cigarette smoke at them"*

"When unwell, or accompanying someone who is unwell, unchosen music is just unpleasant annoying noise"

*"To have such noise pollution deliberately imposed, and by those supposedly responsible for our health, simply beggars belief"*

“...either so loud as to induce headache/nausea, or just loud enough to be a constant irritant...”

*“Studies have proven that when patients are stressed in the waiting room, they cannot focus on presenting accurate and vital information to their GP”*

“I am usually thoroughly irritated by the time I see the doctor. I try to arrange my appointments for first thing in the morning when the doctor is less likely to be behind schedule - not because I want to minimise the wait, but because I want to minimise the time spent being forced to listen to rubbish”

*“There seems to be a fear that "people" nowadays cannot tolerate silence around them - what a misconception”*

\* All these quotes have been taken from <http://www.gopetition.com/petitions/against-forced-music-in-hospitals.html>