

Remarks by Dan Cohen at the
Assembly Standing Committee on Health Public Hearing
on the use of anti-psychotic medication in nursing homes
February 18, 2015

My name is Dan Cohen. I am the founder and Executive Director of Music & Memory, a nonprofit based in NYC.

Thank you for holding this hearing on the problem of antipsychotic overuse in long-term care.

Forty percent of persons with some form of dementia have more advanced forms of the disease. Unfortunately, they are generally viewed by society as being unable to experience pleasure.

These individuals may no longer be able to recognize their family members or even communicate, but when they hear music that holds personal meaning, it can trigger memories, awaken them and help them keep in touch with what makes them unique individuals.

Music & Memory trains care professionals how to use iPod-based personalized music in long-term care organizations and other care settings. We now have more than 1,100 MUSIC & MEMORYSM Certified Facilities, including nursing homes, assisted living facilities, hospices, hospitals, adult day and home care programs, providing personalized music to their residents and clients, in all 50 states, Canada and around the world.

The Wisconsin Department of Health Services has taken the initiative to provide our program in 270 nursing homes that serve 3,000 residents with dementia. The program is so successful that Wisconsin Secretary of Health Kitty Rhoades has committed to bringing Music & Memory to all its nursing homes, then to every assisted living facility, and then to every other dementia care touch point within the Wisconsin health care system. The program has rocketed their position in the quarterly CMS state ranking of antipsychotic use from tenth to third best (lowest) in just 9 months.

Ohio is also initiating Music & Memory programs in 350 facilities within the next four months. Director of Aging Bonnie Burman has secured CMP funds for training staff in 250 of those nursing homes, and the Ohio Health Care Association is providing scholarships to an additional 100 nursing homes to facilitate this beneficial approach. Their goals are to reduce antipsychotic use, depression and pain.

Wisconsin, Ohio, Utah, New Mexico, and Vermont are all using CMP funds approved by their states and CMS. Other sources of funding are involved as well.

The New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation has adopted Music & Memory across all its skilled facilities. Dr. Ravinda Amin, chief psychiatrist at Coler-Goldwater, says that after making iPods available for three years to residents, the facility reduced antipsychotic use from 38 to 13 percent.

For 9 years, NYS DOH's Electronic Dementia Guide for Excellence has recommended to all 650 NYS nursing homes that they use individualized music to reduce agitation, based on research by Linda Gerdner, RN, PhD. But without funding or any requirement to implement the program, the response has been limited, at best.

Currently, there are 65 nursing homes in NYS that are MUSIC & MEMORYSM Certified. A. Holly Patterson has 275 iPods for as many residents and has been providing this benefit since 2006.

Cobble Hill Health Center has implemented the program since 2007. CEO Tony Lewis assesses Music & Memory this way: "Despite the enormous sums of money spent on mood and behavior altering medications that are often not particularly effective, nothing compares to these iPods when it comes to improving quality of life."

To understand the profound impact of Music & Memory, I encourage you to see *Alive Inside*, the Sundance 2014 Audience Award winning documentary about our work. Then show it to members of your Committee. The Ohio Director of Aging distributed a copy to every state legislator. The film is a powerful tool that will generate awareness and spark policy change to reduce antipsychotic use through personalized music.

This widely used, evidence-based intervention in long-term care settings costs approximately \$6 per month. We would encourage the state to support the use of personalized music to quickly reduce the use of unwarranted antipsychotics in our health care system.

For more information, visit www.musicandmemory.org, or contact Dan Cohen, dcohen@musicandmemory.org, 917 923-5636.