



## Music therapy helps my son through cancer treatment

Dana-Farber's music therapy program, offered through the [Leonard P. Zakim Center for Integrative Therapies \(/pat/support/zakim/default.html\)](/pat/support/zakim/default.html), has been a respite for my son Paul during his cancer experience.

Although cancer can sometimes deplete the human spirit, music therapy can uplift and transform — bringing the mind, body, and soul into harmony.

Until you or someone you love is battling cancer, you may not be able to understand the magnitude of the illness and how it can affect you emotionally, physically, and spiritually.

The doctors' appointments, transfusions, infusions, blood counts, surgeries, and diagnostic procedures can literally take over your days, putting your "normal" life on hold.

Paul's life has been on hold since he was struck by a car while riding his bike in 2001, when he was 13. He was not wearing a helmet, and suffered a severe traumatic brain injury. Not expected to live, he was given last rites.

When Paul awoke from a two-month coma, he could not walk or talk. But somehow, through the grace of God, the expertise of doctors, and Paul's own determination, he miraculously recovered.

He regained his cognitive abilities, his voice returned, and he was able to walk to the podium to receive his high school diploma — taking steps his doctors once deemed impossible.

At the time of Paul's graduation he was also recovering from another major hurdle: a bone marrow transplant as [treatment for leukemia \(/pat/pediatric-care/pediatric-programs/leukemia/default.html\)](/pat/pediatric-care/pediatric-programs/leukemia/default.html).

Many children are unable to find a bone marrow donor, but thankfully one of Paul's seven siblings, his 11-year-old brother, was a perfect match, and he received his transplant through Dana-Farber/Children's Hospital Cancer Care.

Isolated and bored in the hospital, Paul picked up a guitar and began to teach himself how to play.

He had been held captive for three months during his transplant procedure and recovery, all alone except for his family and a guitar. The only other people he saw were his care team and the music therapist they recommended, Brian Jantz.

Playing the guitar with Brian kept my son from falling into a deep depression. It gave him something to look forward to, and brought meaning to his days in the hospital and during the following year, when he had to deal with graft-versus-host disease, and was isolated in his bedroom to avoid getting an infection.

After that, Paul was desperate for relief from his symptoms, which included nausea, dizziness, fatigue, and itchiness.

After many types of medications and procedures, he was a little reluctant to experiment with alternative methods, but finally he sought help again from the Zakim Center and tried meditation, hypnosis, and acupuncture.

Remarkably, I saw a transformation in my son's spirit. He now felt he had some control over his situation, and seemed more at peace.

Paul was surprised and relieved when these therapies helped his symptoms subside. He continued to use music as a way to relax and heal. Then he met Jonathan Auerbach, a professional rock musician, song writer, and performer who volunteers with the Zakim Center's music therapy program.

Through his guidance, the Rockin' Time Jam Workshops at Dana-Farber were created, where Jonathan and Brian come together to help pediatric cancer patients find purpose by striving to become musicians. Or sometimes they just hang and "jam."

Today when Paul returns to the Jimmy Fund Clinic, he always leaves time for music therapy. At Jonathan's music workshops, he can enjoy spending time with other kids who are looking for a respite from their cancer — and regroup, revamp, and revive.

Paul's story is just one of many in which integrative therapies, and especially the music therapy program at the Zakim Center, complement western medicine and help to heal and give hope to anyone challenged by cancer.

— Dixie Fremont-Smith Coskie



[Watch Paul play guitar in his music therapy session in this video. \(/media/flash/coskie/\)](/media/flash/coskie/)

## Was this useful?



[E-mail this page \(/Apps/email-a-web-page.aspx?pageUrl=http%3a%2f%2fwww.dana-farber.org%2fpat%2fsupport%2fzakim%2fmusic-therapy-helps-my-son-through-cancer-treatment.html\)](#)

## 'A Beacon of Hope'



In this moving video, patients reflect on what Dana-Farber means to them.

[View video \(/abo/yawkey-center-for-cancer-care/flash/hope/hope.html\)](#)