



Musical Care in Dialogue

Musical Care for the Mind and Brain

Presentation summary by Yi Wang (University of Edinburgh)

13th May 2025 10:00 –11:00 (BST), online with

Shantala Hegde (National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences, India)

Katie Rose Sanfilippo (University of London, UK)

Bonnie McConnell (Australian National University, Australia)

This session focused on the theme “Musical Care for the Mind and Brain,” featuring three researchers who presented diverse perspectives on the role of music in mental health and neurological well-being.

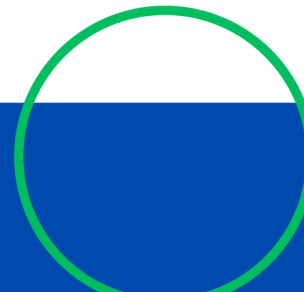
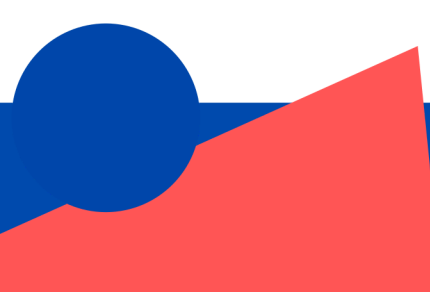
First, Shantala Hegde discussed her pioneering work in integrating Indian classical music rhythms into neuropsychological rehabilitation. Her lab explores rhythm perception as a cognitive process, developing rhythm-based interventions for patients with Parkinson’s disease, stroke, head injuries, and schizophrenia. Techniques include beat-based training and rhythmic speech cueing, showing promising outcomes in cognitive domains such as attention, working memory, and expressive speech. She emphasised rhythm as a foundational, universal feature of human cognition and advocated for music-based rehabilitation as both effective and culturally adaptable.

Following this, Bonnie McConnell and Katie Rose Sanfilippo shared their research on musical care in Gambia from two different but closely related perspectives within the CHIME project, which explores how music can be used to support maternal mental health.

Bonnie, drawing on 15 years of ethnomusicological research in Gambia, introduced Kanyeleng groups -- female fertility societies composed of women who have experienced infertility or child loss. These groups use participatory musical performances that combine singing, drumming, humor, and improvisation to foster social support, emotional resilience, and public health communication.

Building on these embedded practices, Katie described how the CHIME team co-designed six-week workshops with Kanyeleng groups, incorporating traditional melodies, lullabies, and health-themed lyrics. A feasibility trial across four clinics found the intervention highly acceptable, with strong engagement and preliminary evidence of reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression. The collaborative, culturally grounded design process underpins the project’s current expansion into South Africa and Lesotho, where similar music-health relationships are being explored.

The session closed with reflective dialogue among the speakers and attendees on cross-cultural adaptability, interdisciplinary learning, and future directions for sustaining musical care networks.



Speaker biographies

Shantala Hegde

Additional Professor and Consultant, Neuropsychology Unit, National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), Bengaluru, India. Head of the Music Cognition Laboratory at NIMHANS and trained in Neurologic Music Therapy. Former Wellcome Trust-DBT India Alliance Fellow with international research collaborations.

Neuropsychology of Musical Rhythm: From Basics to Clinical Application

In this discussion, Shantala will share methods used in her research and her work exploring how musical care affects the brain. Drawing on studies from the Music Cognition Laboratory, she will focus on how rhythm perception, entrainment, and musical structures, especially those rooted in Indian classical music, can influence brain functions such as motor behaviour and language processing, and support neurorehabilitation.

Bonnie McConnell

Associate Professor, School of Music, Australian National University. Her research explores music, health, and social change in Africa and Australia. She has conducted extensive ethnographic fieldwork in The Gambia and is the author of *Music, Health, and Power*, awarded Honourable Mention for the Society for Ethnomusicology's Nketia Prize.

Musical Care to Support Maternal Mental Health in The Gambia

In this discussion, Bonnie will share findings from long-term ethnographic research with Gambian fertility societies (kanyeleng), exploring how musical care practices can support maternal mental health. She will then discuss how this knowledge informs the development of a community-based intervention (CHIME).

Katie Rose Sanfilippo

Presidential Research Fellow, School of Health and Medical Sciences, City St George's, University of London. Her research focuses on the role of music and the arts in healthcare, with particular emphasis on how community-based interventions can be scaled and sustained in resource-constrained settings. She also collaborates with policymakers and organisations to promote maternal mental health.

Musical Care to Support Maternal Mental Health in The Gambia

In this discussion, Katie Rose will share her research using trial methods to explore the feasibility of CHIME, a community and music-based intervention to support maternal mental health in The Gambia. She will also describe current collaborative work running a large randomised control trial to test the efficacy of the intervention.