

ACTIVITY HEADPHONES IN ACTION

With the sounds of The Andrews Sisters, Dean Martin, Elvis and occasionally a bit of Taylor Swift coming through their Bluetooth headsets, patients are transported through music and movement.

Agitation and frustration are common among those with dementia but after a session at the silent disco, patients feel far more settled and behavioural issues are reduced for the rest of the day.

The after-class effects are amazing, Moove and Groove program organiser Alison Harrington said.



PHOTO Props are also brought in to bring the disco to life.
SUPPLIED

"One lady who hardly ever speaks a word, for an hour after the class she was going around talking fluidly to everyone," Ms Harrington said.

"This switches on pathways in the brain that aren't otherwise accessible.

"Everyone comes out smiling."

The power of headphones



PHOTO Almost everyone in the trial could tolerate the headphones used in the silent disco.
SUPPLIED

However, when the event was tried without using headphones, participation, enjoyment and eye contact levels with the 'DJ' (group facilitator) were halved.

Dementia consultant Rose Rowlson, who completed a trial on the patients, put this down to the fact that headphones provide a much more immersive experience.

"It helps them to focus, it's like someone is talking right to them in their head," Ms Rowlson said.

"There's no distraction when wearing headphones and a lot of people with dementia get really distracted by everyone else and what's going on.

"The difference was remarkable, the level of engagement and the energy was so different without the headsets."



How patients have taken to the concept of a quiet party is impressive, Ms Rowlson said, as those with dementia are not normally able to follow instructions for extended periods of time or show signs of happiness and calm.

But extensive research has proven the power of music in helping those with dementia, as distant memories and feelings are often recollected, even if only for a moment.

"It can bring them into a much happier space," Ms Rowlson said.

"Certain people who have really bad anxiety which was really noticeable beforehand became much more relaxed.

"There is also less likelihood of sundowning."

The only problem encountered was calling last songs.

"They didn't want to stop...they were really disappointed to stop," she said.



'We don't know how long we've got'

Ray McDermott has moderate dementia and he and his wife Kay decided to put their dancing shoes on at Narrabeen's RSL ANZAC Village in Sydney's north.



PHOTO Ray and Kay McDermott loved making new friends and cannot wait to get along to another silent disco.

"Kay suggested I sort of get off the couch and do a little bit of exercise and [we say] 'come on, let's go and enjoy ourselves'," Mr McDermott said.

"I was a little bit apprehensive, thought I'm going to get swamped by the ladies... but I've absolutely enjoyed myself."

Ms McDermott said her husband gets swept up in the experience and gets out of his head.

"He has a ball, he really does...he sings at the top of his voice," she said.

"He just completely forgets all the troubles that can worry us."



PHOTO The silent disco lights up parts of the brain that can bring memories from yesteryear back. SUPPLIED

Mr McDermott said the opportunity to really let go to the music gives the couple satisfaction.

"We don't know how long we've got together... but we come here and enjoy ourselves," he said.

Ms Harrington said the idea of a silent disco seemed far-fetched and she had no idea whether it would work — but the risk has definitely paid off.

"This is the most rewarding thing I've ever done," she said.

"We need to change the paradigm of people ageing."

She is hoping to expand the concept of silent discos for dementia patients and travel to more facilities to bring musical memories back.

This week the NSW Government announced a funding boost for the silent discos for dementia under the Liveable Communities Grant program.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Contact [ZEST Dementia & Aged Care](http://www.zestdementiacare.com.au) for more information on how these innovative Activity Headphones can help in your Activity Program!



zest
Dementia & Aged Care

ZEST Dementia & Aged Care
PO Box 2791
SOUTHPORT BC, 4215 QLD

Phone: 1300 738 883

E: info@zestdementiacare.com.au

W: <http://www.zestdementiacare.com.au>