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Free music service to provide self-care support during coronavirus pandemic

A free new online resource, which combines science and technology to provide a catalogue of soothing and calming music and videos, has been developed to support people who may feel anxious during the COVID-19 pandemic.

[Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust's](#) Recovery College Online and Trauma Informed Care teams have joined forces with music technology company X-System; Northumbria University and the Calm Foundation to provide a series of specially designed playlists that can help people to physically relax, manage their mood, be enlivened or helped to breathe and move.

The playlists are being made freely available to help those who may be suffering during these difficult times, or for their relatives who may be under additional stress.

It is hoped that those using the playlists will complete online diaries

outlining how they have helped to improve their wellbeing.

As music is known to change the way people feel and can enhance health and wellbeing, the Trust hosts a music for wellbeing facility called X-System on its [RecoveryCollege Online website](#). It is usually only available to patients using the service, but thanks to this new partnership, the platform has been opened up and provided free of charge to anyone to use at this time.

The [X-System technology](#) analyses music to predict its effects on the heart, mood and feelings, and even on movement and breathing. This enables it to model how the brain and body respond to music and from here, can automatically predict and organise music tracks into playlists that can support wellbeing, leading listeners mentally and physically from “where they are” to their desired physical and mental state.

Researchers from Northumbria University’s [Department of Computer and Information Sciences](#) have been working on studies around the impact of music on heart rate and emotional state. They will be contributing to this project by evaluating the impact of listening to the music provided through this service on wellbeing. This will enable the playlists to be finetuned for maximum benefit to the listeners.

The University research team is encouraging users of the system to keep an [online diary](#) on their feelings to help further inform the study.

[Dr Petia Sice](#), an Associate Professor specialising in wellbeing informatics at Northumbria University, said: “We know that listening to music has an impact on an individual’s physiology and psychological state which leads to the nervous system producing a relaxation effect. In this current pandemic, mental wellbeing is of critical importance so we are delighted to be collaborating with the Trust, X-System and the Calm Foundation to support people suffering with COVID-19 with this scientifically designed service that will aid their mood and wellbeing.”

Angela Kennedy, Trauma Informed Care Lead at Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust and Mental Health Lead for North of England Clinical Network of NHSE said: “Difficult situations in life can take a toll on our mental and physical wellbeing. In these times it is very important to have ways to counteract that, and we know that music is one thing that works directly on our bodies and our minds.

“Recent medical research has shown that music may have significant effects on the state of our minds and bodies. Music can help us change the way we feel by helping to lift our mood or helping us to relax. This resource might be particularly useful for all of us at this time.

“We believe that this new platform for self-care through music could give valuable support to our service users, staff and the general public,

particularly while we all need to stay at home due to the COVID-19 pandemic. By creating a variety of playlists, the platform allows you to choose a particular type or genre of music that you prefer. The playlists are assembled in a way to help you reach your desired state.

“We are delighted that this partnership is enabling us to widen and open up our services to more people at this difficult time. It has been exciting to work collaboratively on this project that uses the power of music with what we know about the psychology of trauma and healing. As people seek to adapt to the crisis, music, which carries so much meaning in our lives, can play a key part.”

The technology used by X-System to predict the effects of music was designed by Professors Paul Robertson and Nigel Osborne, formerly of Edinburgh University. Paul was an early advocate of music medicine and Nigel pioneered the use of music to support children who are victims of war.

Nigel Osborne, now the Chief Technology Officer of X-System, said: “When we first had the idea of creating X-System, we dreamed that one day we would use it to offer support through music to the health, wellbeing and needs of a wider world. Thanks to the vision and imagination of our colleagues in the NHS, we begin this journey today.”

Anyone wanting to listen to the playlists should visit the Recovery College Online website at www.recoverycollegeonline.co.uk/music-for-wellbeing

The project has been undertaken by volunteers and all costs gifted to the NHS. The music is streamed under a license to conduct medical trials, purchased by [X-System](#).

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