

Music to their ears

Residents who previously had difficulty participating in activities are now enjoying them, with aggressive behaviour and the use of PRN psychotropic drugs reduced – following the introduction of sound beam therapy at Aldersgate Aged Care in Klemzig, South Australia.

Sound beam therapy is a computerised system which emits sound beams between two receivers. The computer is programmed to create a large and varied selection of musical instrument notes and musical compositions. The music and sound is then made with movement. Residents who can't speak or who have cognitive impairment can create music by raising a finger or moving their hand.

The project began a year ago when Aldersgate Aged Care had the opportunity to observe sound beam therapy being used with young children and young adult disability clients.

Sound beam therapy has also been used in the United Kingdom with elderly dementia residents in residential care and as part of stroke rehabilitation programs in a couple of the major hospitals there. Research showed positive results. Residents with cognitive impairment began to interact with the sound beam and those with speech impairment began to form

words associated with the sounds created.

Aldersgate Aged Care decided to conduct a pilot study in their low care secure dementia area using the sound beam technology – the first known use of sound beam therapy in an Australian residential aged care facility. The study aimed to measure behaviour outcomes for residents with dementia and to establish if residents' resistive aggressive behaviour diminished and less PRN psychotropic drugs would be needed.

The initial phase of the pilot study involved purchase of sound beam equipment, training of lifestyle staff and families of residents in the dementia area to explain sound beam research, usage and expected outcomes. All families of residents in the dementia area gave consent for their relative to be part of the trial. Nine residents took part in the trial. All of the residents in the trial had documented behaviours.

To date all residents participating in the sound beam therapy have shown the ability to interact with the sound beam therapy despite their level of dementia or physical disability.

One resident with severe dementia repeatedly used to bang on the table. Individualised care

plan interventions had minimal effect in managing and reducing this behaviour. When sound beam therapy was introduced to this resident, he very quickly recognised that by the movement of banging his hands on the table musical notes were achieved. Gradually his banging of hands on the table decreased and the waving of his hands developed, still creating musical notes, sound and composition.

Sound beam therapy is now a regular part of the activities program within the unit and is currently being rolled out across the facility involving both high and low care residents.

As part of this project sound beam therapy has expanded into a wellness and harmony program that involves assessment of residents using sound, vision and auditory switches to ascertain the individual's positive responses. This is being used together with sound beam therapy in the management of resistive and aggressive behaviours. This will also extend to residents in the palliative phase of life. ■