

Music helps children fight chemo pain

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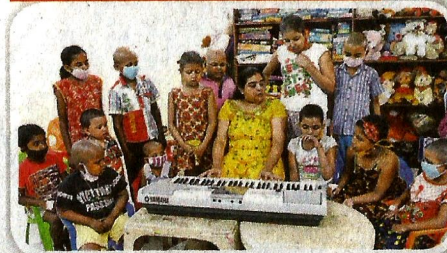
Kolkata: When she was 21-months old, Shruti was diagnosed with lymphoblastic leukaemia. Now four, she has spent more than half her life in and out of Saroj Gupta Cancer Centre and Research Institute. Yet, she looks forward to her hospital visits. It is within the hospital compound that Shruti finds solace in what she loves the most: music.

The music therapy programme here has been a respite for children, especially for those too exhausted with chemo sessions. "When you have a guitar, a drum or a synthesizer in your hand, some times you can't help but dance," said Papri Saha, who works at the hospital's paediatric oncology unit. The unit has a toy train, which was flagged off by Sunil Gavaskar in 1998, chugging around with the kids.

"The 42-bed unit has grown since Mother Teresa inaugurated our first children's ward in 1991. Most children here come from low-income groups. It was my father Saroj Gupta's dream to treat them inside a mini Disneyland here," said Arnab Gupta, director and surgical oncologist.

Nine-year-old Musfikur Rahaman Akash, a student Class III of Bangla-

CARING TO CURE



HOW MUSIC HEALS

- ▶ It taps into emotions
- ▶ Helps improve attention skills
- ▶ Music uses shared neural circuits
- ▶ Enhances learning
- ▶ It is a social experience
- ▶ It is non-invasive, safe and motivating



Children at the paediatric unit look forward to toy train rides and music sessions during their hospital stay

desh's Mymensingh International High School, was jamming with friends when TOI visited the colourful child oncology unit. Ever after six hours of chemotherapy and blood transfusion, he's humming 'Aguner Parashmoni'.

"Music is more than just a fun distraction during a hospital stay. It con-

nects the children to their creativity that is still healthy regardless of illness. In a way, cancer can't touch that," said senior paediatric oncologist Soma De. Music releases feel-good chemicals like endorphin and enkephalin, which make one happy and cheerful, she added.

Recent research lends credence to the fact that emotional gains from mu-

sic therapy can lead to physiological ones, too. According to American Cancer Society, music helps in short-term pain reduction, lessens anxiety and nausea caused by chemotherapy and has small but significant effect on heart rate, blood pressure and respiratory rate.

"Response to treatment is very good in pediatric cancer. Music is the added wonder: I have seen miraculous changes in the attitude of children and their parents," said De.

The glittering eyes of Shakti Kumar, 12, Tua Bhowmik, 13 and Roshni Kumar, 10, vouch for the claims. They are among the 100-odd children from India and the neighbouring countries being treated at Saroj Gupta Cancer Centre and Research Institute for blood cancer and solid tumours.

Their parents are also invited to participate in the music therapy lessons. "This is as much a therapy for them as for the child, particularly if a child is dying or very sick in intensive care," said De, adding, "For these children, treatment means missing school, friends and their daily routine. This is one of the most frightening times in their lives. Music activates reward centers in the brain and forget the fright."

