

London Symphony Orchestra strikes a chord with patients, staff and volunteers at NHS Lothian hospitals.

World-renowned London Symphony Orchestra performed a series of concerts at four hospitals across NHS Lothian as part of the Edinburgh International Festival. The musical events, offered in collaboration with NHS Lothian Charity's Tonic Arts Programme, saw patients and staff enjoy some respite and distraction with 15 performances taking place over three days in August 2023.



London Symphony Orchestra playing at the Western General Hospital



The performance was top notch, I was moved to tears by the first song."

Patient, Blackford Ward, Royal Edinburgh Hospital



1,185 patients, staff and volunteers attended the performances.



London Symphony Orchestra playing at the Western General Hospital

NHS Lothian Charity and Edinburgh International Festival

The London Symphony Orchestra concerts see the continuation of an exciting and ongoing collaboration between the tonic arts programme and Edinburgh International Festival that began with 1,000 NHS Lothian staff attending the 2022 opening gala performance at Murrayfield stadium.

Building on this success both partners were keen to bring the benefits of participation in the arts to NHS Lothian sites to allow both patients and staff to benefit. The result was a weeklong residency by the orchestra with the Tonic Arts team developing, promoting and supporting a timetable of events.

What we delivered

We focused on delivering the performances in spaces which would have the most benefit and be easily accessible for patients and staff. Once the timetable was agreed a comprehensive communications plan was actioned to maximise awareness and engagement. Posters were displayed across the wards and targeted emails were sent to key staff. Each performances lasted approx. 30 minutes enabling staff to engage in breaks and to accommodate patient care.

The Tonic Arts team worked closely with NHS Lothian's Voluntary Service Team to facilitate the events with carefully briefed volunteers.



The lure of the performance seemed to get members of the wider multidisciplinary team out of the office, meetings and into the ward with the patients and the rest of the ward staff to listen and engage with the performers and patients. Some of these staff members then saw certain patients in a different setting, through a different lens than they normally would on the ward."

Music Therapist, Royal Edinburgh Hospital



Volunteers on hand to support the event.



The performances took place across 4 NHS Lothian sites

A range of settings were selected for the performances at the following sites;

- Royal Infirmary Edinburgh
- Western General Hospital
- Royal Edinburgh Hospital
- Royal Hospital for Children and Young People

The performances took place in a variety of spaces such as clinical wards and communal areas. In order to increase opportunities for experiences and interactions out with the clinical setting one of the performances took place in the Community Garden at the Royal Edinburgh Hospital. Cyrenians who manage the garden as part of NHS Lothian Charity's Green Health programme provided seating and refreshments for the event.



Having the performance in the community gardens allowed mingling of community members as well as hospital staff and patients, and provided an environment that was centred around love and appreciation of music."

Staff member, Royal Edinburgh Hospital



London Symphony Orchestra at the Community Garden, Royal Edinburgh Hospital

How the performances made a difference

The London Symphony Orchestra residency supported the Tonic Arts team to meet a number of it's strategic outcomes

Patients experienced less stress and distress.

Patients and staff have improved wellbeing.

Patients, staff and volunteers feel valued.

57%

of staff felt patients were calmer/less distressed during the performance



I noted some patients around me who were noticeably soothed as soon as the music started, and were able to be attentive when prior they were more agitated."

Clinical Nurse Specialist, Royal Edinburgh Hospital

100%

of patients and staff agree that the experience had a positive impact on their health and wellbeing



I was approached by an Emergency Department Consultant who wanted to thank us for organising this and highlight what a positive impact these type of activities have on staff wellbeing."

Site Director, Royal Infirmary Edinburgh

90%

of patients and staff agree that they felt valued by the experience



I think the most obvious change in patients was that they were engaged and felt valued and included by the performance... it felt like a very equalising space for patients to engage within."

Staff member, Royal Infirmary Edinburgh

Next steps

Events and performances like these are part of Tonic Arts' vibrant participatory and live arts programme, using art and creativity to help alleviate stress, reduce anxiety, and create a positive environment for patients, staff, visitors and the wider NHS Lothian community. Research shows the benefits of music therapy in clinical settings, specifically for therapeutic interventions of patients with mental health conditions. Music acts as a medium for processing emotions, trauma, and grief—but music can also be utilised as a regulating or calming tool.

The feedback from this project illustrates the impact this programme of musical performances had on staff and patients. After such a successful project Tonic Arts and Edinburgh International Festival both wish to continue and strengthen the partnership and are investigating various models that would benefit patients and staff of NHS Lothian.



For many patients that was the highlight of their week and some shared tears of joy or nostalgia praising the artists long after they were gone and sharing with family and friends their experience."

Therapeutic Activities Manager,
Western General Hospital



What an absolute treat for everyone who attended but most of all for people who for a variety of reasons have never been able to and are now able to access live performances."

Nurse, Royal Edinburgh Hospital



London Symphony Orchestra playing at the Royal Edinburgh Hospital

Thank you

A huge thanks to Edinburgh International Festival and the musicians from the London Symphony Orchestra, the in-kind contribution of these concerts was £10,665.

Thank you also to NHS Lothian Charity partners, NHS Lothian staff and volunteers for supporting this wonderful series of performances.