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MUSIC AS A HEALTH PROMOTION AGENT IN PALLIATIVE CARE: THE ST CHRISTOPHER'S COMMUNITY CHOIR

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Traditionally, health promotion has focused on illness prevention, and is addressed to people who are 'fit' and 'well'. In recent years however, there has been an increased interest in health promotion's relevance within the palliative care field. Although death cannot be prevented, health promotion initiatives can provide education and social support regarding death and dying, and help change death-denying health policies and attitudes. These initiatives gradually become a key aspect of hospices' work, and a new emerging area for music and other arts practitioners.

Drawing from the example of St Christopher's Community Choir (and its Band), this presentation focuses on music's role as a health promotion agent in palliative and bereavement care. Run by two music therapists, the choir was founded in 2011 as part of St Christopher's wider death education and social initiatives; today it has more than 80 members including people from the local community, patients, families, bereaved people, staff and volunteers. Through brief case studies, different people's pathways and social stories within and beyond the choir are explored. This presentation shows how music's power to build community can become a key element within health promotion initiatives in palliative and bereavement care, while new potential prospects for music therapists working in the field are outlined.