

From VOA Learning English, welcome to As It Is! I'm June Simms in Washington.

Have you ever imagined what the world was like when dinosaurs ruled the Earth? Today, we look at a movie that is letting audiences experience what this might have been like.

First, two recent studies looked at the effect music can have on severely ill people. VOA's Richard Paul reported on the results of those studies. We hear more about that story coming up.

Music and the Brain

Hospitals employ many therapeutic methods. In addition to medication, there are interventions like massage therapy and hypnosis. Music therapy is also growing in popularity. Sandra Siedliecki is a Senior Scientist at the Nursing Institute of Cleveland Clinic in Ohio. She says music is a low cost treatment.

"There's a couple of reasons for music. One - it's very inexpensive."

And she says scientists have done a lot of research on music's effect on pain.

“Especially, Dr. Marian Good who did an awful lot on acute pain and music. She did a lot of studies looking at abdominal surgery patients and the use of music.”

In those studies, as in many others, patients listened to relaxing music like this.

Dr. Good found that her surgery patients took fewer pain drugs when they listened to music. Dr. Siedliecki says taking fewer drugs is helpful because the side effects linked to pain medicines can outweigh their value.

“You get to the point where one more pill and the side effects aren’t quite worth it.”

Dr. Good’s study looked at short-term pain. However, chronic pain, the kind that just will not go away, is also a common problem.

“People with chronic pain feel powerless. They’ve already tried everything. There’s no choices left, so they feel powerless to do anything that’s going to make it better.”

Dr. Siedliecki was looking at ways to treat that sense of powerlessness, as well as patients’ depression, disability, and pain.

Dr. Linda Chlan was studying something else. She was not interested in patients' pain, but instead their anxiety or extreme worry.

Dr. Chlan is a Professor of Symptom Management Research in the Nursing School at Ohio State University. She has spent a lot of time with people who are in the hospital because their anxiety is so great that they cannot breathe. People with this condition often have to use breathing machines. Dr. Chlan says that sometimes medication does little to ease their condition.

"I was always struck by the profound distress that these patients experience regardless of the amount of medications that we gave them."

It was not just that the medicines did not work. Sometimes they made things worse.

"Sometimes they would get more anxious and more anxious."

And just as in the case of Dr. Siedliecki's pain patients, the drugs the anxiety patients were taking have unwanted side effects.

"We had two primary aims of this study: To reduce anxiety as well as sedative exposure. If they can control a non-pharmacological intervention in the form of relaxing, preferred music, can that have a beneficial effect?"

Dr. Chlan had nurses remind patients that music was another choice to ease their symptoms. They also placed signs near the patients' beds.

"Listen to your music at least twice today."

Another group in Dr. Chlan's study used noise-cancelling headphones with no music. A third group received standard care.

Dr. Siedliecki's study also had three groups. One group listened to music from past studies. Another group was able to pick its own music. The third group received traditional treatment. Dr. Siedliecki says the results were positive in both studies.

"When you look at it overall, power, pain, depression and disability as a group improved in the music groups."

Dr. Chlan's study looked to decrease the intensity of the drugs people had to take and how often they took them. She also found that music worked.

The people who listened to music needed fewer doses and had a 36 percent reduction in the intensity or the amount of medication they received. In addition, their anxiety decreased by about 36 percent. Both doctors had similar explanations for why music was so successful.

“Music operates on many levels. It can be a very powerful distractor in the brain, where we’re listening to something that is pleasing and then it interrupts stressful thoughts.”

“Music can be a distraction. And if you’re doing something you enjoy, time seems to go by faster.”

These doctors seem to agree with a line from the old Bob Marley song, “Trenchtown Rock.” It says “one good thing about music, when it hits you, you feel no pain.”

You are listening to As It Is from VOA Learning English. I’m June Simms.

“Walking with Dinosaurs” Blends Entertainment, Science

The film called “Walking with Dinosaurs” is a story that mixes entertainment with science. The actors who performed the voices of the characters say they found themselves learning more about the ancient creatures as they made the movie. Jim Tedder reports.

The 3-D film is set in Alaska during the late Cretaceous Period, 70 million years ago. A media event at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles had an actor in a dinosaur costume and three of the film’s stars, including John Leguizamo. He stood beside the oversized dinosaur.

"You're not scared?"

Leguizamo says the movie was well researched. The settings were partly filmed in Alaska and the computer-generated dinosaurs include a plant-eating species called Pachyrhinosaurus.

The film follows a herd of Pachyrhinosaurus, creatures with large bony skulls, and a young member of the tribe named Patchi.

Leguizamo is the voice of a smaller creature, named Alex.

In the film, he congratulates a pachyrhinosaur couple on their newly hatched baby.

"Well, look what we have here? Allow me to congratulate you on this happiest of occasions."

Tiya Sircar voices a female pachyrhinosaur. She says the science behind the film interested her.

"I actually, for a lot of my elementary school years, thought that I would be an archeologist or a paleontologist when I grew up. That did not happen, as of yet. I mean, who knows."

Skyler Stone, the voice behind a character named Scowler, also learned something while making the movie.

“There were dinosaurs I’d never heard of. I was like ‘wait a minute.’ They were like, ‘Yeah, we just discovered these ones.’ I said, ‘What? This is crazy?’”

“Walking with Dinosaurs” is based on a popular science series on the BBC. Some critics say the TV series was better than the film. But Luis Chiappe disagrees. He heads the Natural History Museum’s Dinosaur Institute and advised the filmmakers. He says films like this one get kids involved in science.

“They stimulate them to come to a place like this, the natural history museum, to see the real thing. So they’re fun, they’re educational, and they’re inspirational.”

And he likes the story.

I’m Jim Tedder.

And that is As It Is. Thanks for sharing your day with us. I’m June Simms. Enjoy your day!