

Being a pharmacy student, I have learned that medication can be a powerful tool for some disease states. However, the current medications available for dementia do not adequately reduce the disease burden. Perhaps medications prolong the inevitable, but ultimately cognitive decline continues, leaving the patient and caregivers helpless. Witnessing first-hand the impact of dementia and Alzheimer's disease, I sought to determine if alternative therapies have been studied for their effect on quality of life in patients affected by dementia. Given that disease progression is inevitable, improving quality of life is an important measure for patients with dementia and its relief of caregiver burden would be welcome.

To execute this project, specific alternative therapies of interest were identified (music, art, photo, and animal assisted) and then "alternative therapies" was searched to explore other potential therapy options. Search criteria were defined and searches of PubMed, CINAHL, and PsycINFO were conducted (See Table 1). A total of 119 records were found; 11 articles were viable after removing duplicates and applying inclusion and exclusion criteria (See Figure 1). Of the 11 records, 6 utilized music therapy, 2 utilized animal assisted therapy, 1 utilized phototherapy, 2 utilized art therapy, and 3 utilized another intervention (See Figure 2). Despite being the most studied, music therapy only showed statistical significance in 2 of the included records. However, music therapy provided clinically significant improvement in quality of life across all studies that evaluated it. Other interventions generally did not show much statistical significance, potentially a result of numerous factors including small sample sizes (around 20 patients).

Over the last year, I learned little research has been conducted surrounding alternative therapies as a means of improving quality of life in patients with dementia, though music therapy is the most well studied. More importantly, however, I learned the most about the process of conducting a systematic review. Researching multiple databases and including and excluding articles took more time than I anticipated. I found myself rushing through the process and having to redo much of it because rushing makes for a sloppy and unorganized mess. A systematic review must be conducted slowly, and organization of notes and information is key. Because of my own oversight, my research is incomplete, but I now know what I need to do moving forward to work as effectively and efficiently as possible.