

Carolyn Phillips, PhD, MSN, RN



Short Professional Biography:

Dr. Carolyn Phillips is an assistant professor at The University of Texas at Austin School of Nursing whose research is at the intersection of health and the arts. With an extensive clinical background in oncology nursing and advanced post-doctoral training at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute/Harvard Medical School, Dr. Phillips has distinguished herself as an expert in applying innovative research methods in the design and evaluation of music-based interventions that harness the transformative power of the arts to address a range of health challenges. She has developed and tested the Storytelling Through Music intervention, tailored for diverse populations, including bereaved parents coping with the loss of a child to cancer and healthcare professionals who face the emotional toll of high-stress clinical environments. Her past oncology experience informs her *new direction* of research (cognitive impairment in people with multiple sclerosis) because of the similar coping, psychosocial, and functional adjustments that take place when diagnosed with a serious illness. Currently, she is leading the Music-4-MS Optimization Study, which explores a 12-week, ukulele-based cognitive rehabilitation intervention to enhance cognitive outcomes for people with multiple sclerosis.

Brief Description of Your Project:

Traditional cognitive rehabilitation approaches often rely on visual or speech-based exercises, limiting multi-modal engagement and accessibility. To address this gap, the proposed study seeks to optimize Music-4-MS, a novel, ukulele-based cognitive rehabilitation intervention. Building on our team's proof-of-concept study with 29 people with MS, will collaborate with 1) a music therapist, 2) a music and human learning expert, and 3) past participants to record a 12-week Music-4-MS video series and redesign the instructional manual following principles of small-step learning. The manual will feature enhanced typography and streamlined sequencing to reduce cognitive load, while the video series will reinforce learning through repetition, motivational vignettes, and pacing. To evaluate the optimized Music-4-MS intervention, we will conduct focus group interviews with 20 people living with MS to understand their perception of engagement, utility, and cognitive load as they navigate the optimized intervention.