

[Mending spirits through music](#)

April 14, 2016 10:15 AM Carolyn Scofield

cscofiel@tulane.edu

An acoustic version of the Beatles' "Eleanor Rigby" masks the hum of medical machines in the Tulane Comprehensive Cancer Clinic infusion room. [Dr. William "Rusty" Robinson](#), Maxwell E. Lapham professor of gynecologic oncology and section chief, strums a guitar while second-year medical student Shuo Huang expertly plays her violin. The two are volunteers with the Music Mends program, an idea started a few years ago and one Huang revived after her mother went through treatment at the [Tulane Cancer Clinic](#).

"Going with my mom to chemotherapy sessions and seeing her having to sit here for hours on end and not having anything really to do, to have at least a distraction for patients here, it's worked out very well so far," Huang says.

The program is open to students, faculty and staff in the School of Medicine along with hospital employees. The volunteers spend a couple hours a week entertaining patients.

"The patients greatly appreciate seeing another side of their providers," says Robinson, a longtime musician outside of his medical career. "They really get into it when they can perceive their provider as something more than just the administrator of bad news."

Robinson says the music benefits the performers too. It helps them connect with patients on a more personal level. It also brings back a skill Huang and many of her fellow students thought they would no longer use in medical school.

"I've been playing violin ever since I was 6, but had to stop for a while because of studying," she says. "This is just a great release from having to stare at textbooks all the time."

Music Mends works in conjunction with the [Arts in Medicine](#) program at the cancer clinic, which also includes group art activities and chair-side crafts in the infusion room. Research has shown cancer patients who participated in arts therapy programs reported feeling less depression, anxiety and pain than those who didn't.

Huang is now expanding Music Mends to the uptown campus in the hopes of recruiting more volunteers.