

# The best of us has gone – obituary for Dr. Martina de Witte

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## Obituary

This is an obituary, where there should be none. Martina de Witte, one of our best researchers in music therapy and creative arts therapies worldwide, has left this world on 11.03.2025 at only 43 years of age. She died of triple negative breast cancer, a cancer that sometimes hits young women during their pregnancy. She leaves her husband Alex and their boy Sinne behind. Martina and Alex married on 21.02.2025, their last day in Melbourne, just a few hours before they took the plane back home, because of a rapid decline of Martina's health. It was a beautiful wedding with friends and family attending online. Martina was from the Netherlands and worked as a music therapist and as a *Senior lecturer and Coordinator of the Master's Program (MA)* at HAN University of Applied Sciences Nijmegen, with a specialization on teaching research and research methods in the field of CATs. She also served as *Coordinator of Research and Innovation (BA)* at HAN University of Applied Sciences Nijmegen, with the responsibilities of leading a group of 20+ teachers, and coordinating the final year BA on research education. She worked as a *Researcher* at the University of Amsterdam (PhD project, NWO grant), and as a member of the national research group *KenVak* in the field of CATs, and as an editorial board member of *GMS Journal of Arts Therapies – Journal of Art-, Music-, Dance-, Drama- and Poetry-Therapy*.

In 2022, she was awarded the highly regarded McKenzie Fellowship from the University of Melbourne and moved to Australia in September 2023 with her son and partner to join Prof. Felicity Baker and Prof. Katrina McFerran at the renowned CAMTRU – Creative Arts and Music Therapy Research Unit at the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music. In Melbourne, she worked primarily on research syntheses and meta-analyses.

Martina spearheaded two of the most important publications in the field of CATs: “From therapeutic factors to mechanisms of change” in 2021 [1], as part of the research of the International Research Alliance (IRA; founded by Dr. Nisha Sajnani), and the “Umbrella Review – A review of reviews of the evidence in the Creative Arts Therapies” from 2022 to 2025 [2] as another part of the research of the IRA in cooperation with JAHl and WHO. She had such joy in coordinating these global research groups, which she did with the utmost grace and lightness. She was a true transdisciplinary scholar in the CATs, and leading and co-leading several meta-analyses on music therapy, drama therapy, and other CATs [3], [4]. The 2021 paper on therapeutic mechanisms has since become one of the most highly cited papers in our field <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.678397>.

She was a true team player and lived by the principle “I am because we are” (Ubuntu). She knew that we would only succeed if we all went together, no matter where our competences lie. She had the passion and will to build upon everybody's strength. This is rare for a young researcher. Her wisdom made her a great leader of research teams with scholars much older and more experienced than herself. She led these groups with sparkling intelligence and remarkable inclusion, always goal-oriented, striving for the best of the field. Her humility and drive gave us an inspiring example and brought forth the best in her collaborators – and it continues to do so.

Martina was a wonderful person with calmness, warmth, and empathy. Beyond her sharp intellect, she had a gift to see what was needed. I remember sharing with her that a dementia medication for my father was unavailable in Germany for several months. Without hesitation, she sourced it from the Netherlands and sent it over, repeating this act of kindness without seeking recognition.

She died as she lived, open, calm, and caring. Even on her last day with us, she was providing us with her ideas for the future of the field. She wanted us to:

1. Build a database of RCTs in the Creative Arts Therapies, so that we could use that data to learn more about the effects of interventions, therapeutic factors and relations we were not able to detect so far;
2. Not run behind research calls like crazy (they mostly require too much toll in terms of time and bending our ideas), but to just directly investigate what is necessary in our view, in a way that makes sense to us to the field, and the patients;
3. Stop comparing types of interventions particularly between music and music therapy; the results of the umbrella review [2] show that both work; the focus should be on going together with other professionals and knowing each other's competence and limits, and to disseminate the interventions with the best possible outreach, listening to practitioners as much as we can on the way.

She was communicating this to colleagues and educating policy makers and stakeholders in the Netherlands and beyond, for them to gain a wider understanding of what CATs are and can do.

Martina will be deeply missed in all these areas. We will hold her dearly in our memories. Our hopes were for a bright future of our profession under her caring engagement and leadership. We are grateful for her legacy and know that she would have done so much more good... We are very sad, it is very tough, but it is time to let go. With the utmost awe in the face of what we cannot change.

Sabine Koch, Editor-in-Chief

## Notes

## Competing interests

The author declares that she has no competing interests.

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