

Health: Program helps prevent falls by improving seniors' balance

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School of Nursing, was in charge of the Dec. 2 and 3 conference. She said she was impressed with Krampe's way of doing things gently.

"Regardless of what your physical state is, you can participate in this," she said. "This is exactly what our nursing home residents need. If you can move your head side to side, you can participate."

Farrah said Krampe used music that seniors could relate to and wore a top hat and feather boa to draw people in.

"She made it seem so comfortable and natural," Farrah said.

Socialization is important for residents of nursing homes. They can get bored and lonely, Farrah said, and anything people can do to spice up their lives helps.

Testing the method

Before introducing the program to Columbia, Krampe did a pilot study in 2008 with the Alexian Brothers Program of All-inclusive Care for the Elderly, or PACE, in St. Louis. The study was small, with 11 people, but went well. She received an Alexian Brothers Ministry Grant to fund her training so she could lead future programs.

"I wanted to learn the theory behind it so I could know a lot more than just what I was told about it," Krampe said.

Krampe used and enhanced the information from the pilot study for her dissertation intervention. In January and February 2010, seniors at TigerPlace participated in the dance classes.

The participants were asked to attend classes three times a week for six weeks, and each session lasted 45 minutes.

"(The seniors) were asked to take 18 doses of the 'medi-

cine,'" Krampe said.

Each class began with the song "Tiny Bubbles." During the song, the group blew bubbles so they could start breathing deeply before starting the movement part of the class.

After the warm up, the class did dances that were specially choreographed to be done sitting or standing. Participants cooled down with sharing time and a sing-along to "I Hope You Dance."

"I landed on this particular type of dance because it works so well with older people," Krampe said. "I knew I'd use a method that would be safe and not harmful to them."

Building from the past

Sherry Lebed Davis, who is based in Lynnwood, Wash., and is the president of Healthy-Steps, said Krampe's research is vital to the senior community.

"If you can take a program that will significantly change seniors' quality of life and extend their time to live, why wouldn't you?" she said.

Davis and her two brothers founded the program. In 1980, their mother was diagnosed with breast cancer, and after going through surgery, she had severe loss of range of motion and went into a depression.

Davis started as a professional dancer and became a dance movement therapist. Her two brothers were, and still are, OB-GYN physicians and surgeons. With these backgrounds, they developed the Lebed Method, now called Healthy-Steps.

"It was put together to help people get better emotionally and to relieve depression, stress and anxiety," Davis said. "It was put together to

help people improve their balance, range of motion, strength, flexibility and their transition of steps."

The first program started at the Albert Einstein Medical Center in Philadelphia, where Davis' mother had surgery. The surgeon wanted every breast cancer patient in his hospital to go through the program, Davis said.

After People magazine published a story about the method in 2000, Healthy-Steps went international and was applied to other diagnoses. More than 900 hospitals in 14 countries use the program, along with other facilities around the world, like wellness centers, assisted living centers and cancer centers.

The method has been used to improve the well being of people with chronic illnesses and other conditions. For people with lymphedema, a swelling anywhere in the body, Healthy-Steps helps reduce fluid build-up through the movements.

For seniors, Healthy-Steps helps prevent falls by focusing on certain movements that increase gait and balance. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one-third of adults age 65 and older will fall each year, and two million will be treated in emergency departments for fall injuries that can be detrimental to their health.

Krampe continues to research Healthy-Steps and is meeting with facilities in St. Louis to help set up more dance therapy programs.

"What we need to do now is build the evidence," Krampe said. "Ultimately we need large studies to demonstrate that this really does make a difference in balance and mobility."