

# The Lebed Method – focus on healing through movement and dance

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Last year I went on a study tour to the LUSA funded through a Florence Nightingale Travel Scholarship. As part of that experience I attended a dance class provided for breast cancer survivors with lymphoedema in Meriden, Connecticut. Meriden is a small town, within commuter distance of Hartford and is the home of the MidState Medical Center. This small hospital provides cancer care and has won a number of awards for providing an excellent patient experience. In addition to clinical services a range of exercise classes and self help groups are available for cancer survivors including yoga and pilates. These all form part of a package of care aimed at helping individuals to take control of their health and wellbeing. The focus at MidState is on facilitating patients with cancer to become people who had cancer, by encouraging independence and assisting people to get on with their lives. MidState Medical Center also offers a Lebed Method movement and dance class for women breast cancer survivors who have developed lymphoedema. It was this class that drew me to this New England back water and specifically to Susan Sandel and her colleagues.

In 2005 a pilot study was reported in *Cancer Nursing* (Sandel et al 2005) investigating the effects of a dance and movement programme on shoulder function and quality of life in breast cancer survivors. The pilot study conducted at MidState and the University of Connecticut Cancer Centre used a randomised controlled cross-over design. Women treated for breast cancer in the previous five years were recruited and randomly allocated to a twelve week exercise programme or waiting list for 12 weeks followed by the programme. The

results collected at baseline, weeks 13 and 26 indicated that quality of life (measured using FACT-B version 3) and shoulder movement were improved in both groups. The limitations of the pilot study in terms of sample size, lack of homogeneity and possible influence of the trainer on the outcomes were recognised by the authors. Despite those limitations the results suggest there may be something of value in the programme – hence my interest.

The Lebed Method (Lebed Davis 2002) is a programme of stretching and gentle movements drawn from jazz and ballet undertaken to music. It was pioneered in Philadelphia by Sherry Lebed Davis, a former professional dancer, and her brothers, both two gynaecologists. Their mother, an ex professional ballroom dancer developed breast cancer and following a mastectomy experienced pain, depression, lack of mobility and generally felt out of control. In response, drawing on the family expertise, the three of them developed a programme of exercise based on their understanding of the disease and its management and Sherry's background in dance. Subsequently Sherry also developed breast cancer and the instructor became the student and Lebed method with its focus on healing helped her on her personal journey of recovery. Classes are now delivered across North America, in Australasia and in the UK (see <http://www.lebedmethod.com>).

The class I attended on a warm evening in a room on the first floor of a residential home for the elderly in a retirement village in Connecticut followed the standard Lebed approach. All of my fellow classmates, approximately 20 women varying in age from about 40 to 80, were put through our paces by Sandra Sandel. We

started with a basic warm up including breathing exercises. This was followed by a series of movements designed to restore flexibility (core exercises). These were followed by a dance routine and a relaxation exercise, in all lasting about an hour. Large elastic exercise bands and brightly coloured feather boas were used at various points to assist in coaxing and supporting stretch and some of the movements were undertaken seated. Indeed most of the routine could be successfully completed in that way if a class participant had limited lower limb mobility.

The Lebed Method, Focus on Healing through Movement and Dance, has become an internationally known therapeutic exercise programme and is today accessed by people experiencing the effects of cancer and other chronic debilitating conditions as well as those with breast cancer and lymphoedema. It is suitable for all ages including children. Classes are available in some parts of the UK and following successful completion of a certified three day Lebed Method Instructor training certification programme and examination you could become a Certified Lebed Method (CLM) Instructor.

## References

Lebed Davis S (2002) *Thriving after Breast Cancer*, Broadway Books New York

Sandel S, Judge J O, Landry N, Faria L, Ouellette R and Majczal M (2005) Dance and movement program improves offers quality-of-life measures in breast cancer *Cancer Nursing* 28 (4) 301-309

## Editor's Note

You can read more from Anne Topping on training in the Lebed Method in our new feature, "Top Tips" on page 14. ☼