

Healthy-Steps helps seniors stay balanced

The dance-based therapy program helps senior citizens stay mobile.

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Jean Krampe wanted to help prevent older people from falling, so she taught them a new way to dance.

Krampe knew that mobility and balance are two of the main reasons seniors fall, and she wanted to find a way to change these factors. Through her doctoral studies at MU's Sinclair School of Nursing, she found that dancing was becoming a popular therapy method.

She decided on Healthy-Steps, a dance-based therapy and movement program.

Although the program had been used to treat people with chronic illnesses, Krampe was the first to apply Healthy-Steps to people 65 and older and conduct studies on its effects. Her studies had positive results, showing that seniors would come to the activity and move during the sessions. Results also showed trends toward improving gait and balance.

Krampe, now an assistant professor at St. Louis University School of Nursing, introduced Healthy-Steps to the residents of TigerPlace, an independent living facility in Columbia, as part of her dissertation project.

"It's going to take a multitude of interventions to help reduce falls," Krampe said, "and this is one that may have some evidence going forward."

Seniors reported they tremendously enjoyed the program, Krampe said. The results were so positive that the sessions are going to become a regular part of the activities at TigerPlace.

Growing the program

Helen Steinmann, lifestyle coordinator at TigerPlace, will run the program when classes begin in early January 2011. She was certified to be a Healthy-Steps instructor in October during a three-day certification training at Ellis Fischel Cancer Center.

"Watching the residents here at TigerPlace participate in the class Jean offered made me aware that it is something they would enjoy and benefit from," Steinmann said.

The facility will hold at least two classes per week. Steinmann hopes to have between six and eight people in each class, but there is room for as many as 10 participants per session. Healthy-Steps will be open to all TigerPlace residents. The facility is owned and operated by Americare Systems Inc., in conjunction with the Sinclair School of Nursing, which provides all nursing services.

"I think it's going to be a great program," Steinmann said. "It is just plain fun."

Ellis Fischel Cancer Center will also start holding Healthy-Steps in 2011.

Victoria Day, an active dance-based therapy instructor, will hold classes at the Unity Center of Columbia beginning on Jan. 22. The six-week sessions will be open to anyone 18 and older. She will hold a presentation and a free class on Jan. 16 at the center.

Recognizing the benefits

Krampe participated in a gerontology nursing conference this month at the Peachtree Catering and Banquet Center in Columbia. This included a Healthy-Steps exhibit and a demonstration of the dance therapy.

Shirley J. Farrah, assistant dean in the nursing outreach department of the Sinclair

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