

Next Practice: Healthy-Steps for Older Adult

By: *Jean Krampe, PhD, RN, CPHQ, CLM*

St. Louis University School of Nursing, St. Louis, MO

Many breast cancer survivors are thriving into their 70's, 80's and beyond. The preventive measures for lymphedema continue to be important for these older adults. At the same time, these patients are often challenged with co-morbidities common to the aging population, such as osteoarthritis. As we move into Health Care Reform, innovative "Next Practices" which are the next generation of "Best Practices" should be considered to both prevent and treat diseases. This case study depicts one of these options.

After a long career of homemaking, Ms. R was widowed at the age of 75. Because she enjoys socializing with people her own age, she decided to move into a senior apartment. Ms. R attends all of the low-impact exercise programs offered, including Tai Chi, as she knows that exercise is important for the osteoarthritis in both of her knees.

Ms. R does not discuss her total bilateral mastectomy with many people these days. It was so long ago. The twenty years since her surgery have been bitter-sweet, with the birth of her twin granddaughters and death of her husband who was her best friend. Ms. R is grateful that she has joyful memories of when she used to go dancing with her husband. She still remembers their 50th wedding anniversary, dancing around the banquet hall with the lights dimmed low, while her husband sang their favorite Elvis song "Can't Help Falling in Love" just like she was a new bride. She replays this memory often now, and it brings her comfort and peace, even when her osteoarthritis pain flairs up or her breast scar tissue feels tight.

Ms. R noticed the promotional flyer advertising a new exercise program being offered at her senior apartment titled Healthy-Steps immediately the day it was posted. Her building manager told her that Healthy-Steps is a dance therapy program that is based on movements that are used in allopathic, medically based therapies such as physical and occupational therapy programs.¹ Also known as The Lebed Method™ (TLM), this dance-based exercise has been offered internationally since 2000 to populations who have physical limitations and has been very popular at senior centers.

Ms. R asked one of her granddaughters to look it up in the Internet www.gohealthysteps.com and learned that this program was created by a professional dancer and her physician brothers as a treatment and preventive measure for lymphedema. Ms. R was very impressed to learn that TLB is led by a specially trained and certified instructor in over 500 medical and community facilities in 14 countries.

She also learned that TLM focuses on helping to improve chronic disorders and enhancing recovery of patients with acute illness or post-surgical issues, as well as focusing on the emotional and the psychosocial improvement of its participants. Furthermore, TLM movements are specifically designed for persons with limited upper and lower body movement. All of the movements can be done standing, sitting, or a combination of both. This part really appealed to Ms. R, since her energy level varies from day to day.

Ms. R could not wait to try out this new Healthy-Steps program. She already attended weekly Tai Chi classes at her senior apartment, and planned to continue. She understood Healthy-Steps offered another choice for a gentle exercise focused on lymphedema prevention, range of motion, mood, balance, and gait ^{2,3}.

Ms. R signed up for a six-week session and found out that each session began with a 10-minute set of movements to stimulate lymphatic circulation. The certified instructor played upbeat music and provided bottles of bubbles to blow as the group completed this special lymphatic warm-up. The instructor explained that the circulation of the lymph, dependent on intra-thoracic pressure changes with respiration and muscular contraction, is promoted by TLM movements through controlled respiration, directed skeletal muscle contractions, and gravitational assistance.¹ All movements were slow and rhythmic to facilitate deep breathing and gently increase the heart rate. A typical session included choreographed dance sequences that combine gentle, low-impact aerobic, jazz, and ballet movements repeated several times as a dance routine using a range of tempos, choreographed to Big Band music, and other music of the participants' era. A cool-down and group sharing activity concluded each 45-minute session.

In the first two weeks, Ms. R began to see that the best part about Healthy-Steps is that each participant worked at his/her own pace. They each had a chair near them so they had a choice to sit or stand for each routine. She was pleased to see the group included men and women,

some with walkers and some in wheelchairs.

As the weeks progressed, Ms. R began to notice decreased stiffness in her knee osteoarthritis and decreased chest tightness after she attended Healthy-Steps sessions. Ms. R laughed with her dance classmates when the instructor passed out feather boas to wear during the jazz routines. The men were given top hats and always tipped their hats to the ladies at the end of each routine. She was not sure why, but something about the feather boa allowed her to relax and dance her heart out. She felt better overall and looked forward to her weekly Healthy-Steps dance sessions.

The positive outcomes that she felt physically were compounded by the psychosocial benefits she was experiencing. When the instructor played her favorite Elvis song, she could not hold back the tears. She was not crying for her loss in the past, but rather rejoicing for the new exercise she found that fulfilled her needs today.

1. Lebed Davis, S. (2002). *Thriving after breast cancer: Essential healing exercises for body and mind*. Broadway Books; New York.
2. Sandel, S., Judge, J., Landry, N., Faria, L., Ouellette, R., & Majczak, M. (2005). Dance movement program improves quality-of life-measures in breast cancer survivors. *Cancer nursing*, 28(4), 301-309.
3. Krampe, J., Rantz, M., Dowell, L., Schamp, R., Skubic, M., & Abbott, C. (2010). Dance-based therapy in a Program of All-inclusive Care for the Elderly: An integrative approach to decrease fall risk. *Nurse Administration Quarterly*, 34 (2), 156–161.

Jean Krampe, PhD, RN, CPHQ, CLM
jkrampe@slu.edu