

Healthy steps: moving to better health with The Lebed Method

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The Lebed Method (TLM) focuses on healing through movement and dance. It is a therapeutic exercise programme for people who have had breast surgery, node dissection, radiation, chemotherapy, lymphoedema, or who suffer with chronic conditions. The Method was designed to help people:

- ◆ Regain range of motion
- ◆ Increase flexibility in frozen shoulder
- ◆ Work with physical balance issues
- ◆ Help reduce swelling from lymphoedema
- ◆ Improve depression
- ◆ Improve self image
- ◆ Help stabilize weight.

The Lebed Method

TLM (Lebed-Davis, 2002) uses exercises in a particular sequence that will open the lymphatic system helping to reduce the risk of lymphoedema developing after cancer treatments and also reducing the swelling caused by lymphoedema. This group of upper body exercises, known as lymphatic opening, starts every class. The style of movement is slow, smooth and with very slight resistance, no more than 4 repetitions of each movement are carried out on either arm at one time. This lymphatic opening emulates manual lymphatic drainage (MLD). The classes have been designed to promote a person's physical and emotional health.

A further group of exercises can follow the lymphatic opening session, particularly when lower limb lymphoedema is present. These exercises are performed seated and aid the flow of lymph by pumping and releasing the inguinal glands. Simple movements such as seated marching, leg raises and leg opening exercises complete the routine. The body's lymphatic system is then ready for further movements.

Although TLM was originally developed for breast cancer patients, it is now used for any type of cancer or chronic condition including motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis and fibromyalgia, and has now been established in palliative and hospice care throughout the UK.

The unique aspects of the programme—such as using props—provide fun and a distraction from the discomfort of exercise which means that participants can enjoy the class. A goal of the class is to feel good mentally as well as physically and to improve energy levels (Sandel, 2005). Education and social support are also main components of

the class, enabling people to connect with each other and share information.

Post surgery body image is addressed during the dance routines, which may use props such as feather boas and glittery hats alongside movements that encourage a positive feeling about one's body. The aim of this approach is to promote a sense of joy and laughter in the participants. Fun is a core element of TLM. Patients don't wish to be reminded of their ill-health label but wish to move forward in a safe and supported way.

TLM and Lymphoedema

It is recommended to use a compression sleeve and a hand gauntlet during a Lebed Method class, to encourage lymphatic flow, for those with lymphoedema.

Fourie (2008) referred to the development of lymphatic scarring and secondary lymphoedema which can develop after surgery or radiation treatment due to:

- ◆ Soft tissue fibrosis
- ◆ A deficit in muscle strength and flexibility
- ◆ Lymphatic insufficiency
- ◆ Neural hypersensitivity.

He identified that transient lymphostasis may become chronic and can progress to secondary lymphoedema. Indeed, Bouffard et al (2008) identified that measured, dose specific exercise—brief stretches, started early and gently—beyond the habitual range of motion decreases the risk of fibrosis and improved lymphatic circulation in animal

ABSTRACT

The Lebed Method is an innovative exercise and movement programme using dance and physiotherapy movements to improve lymphatic function, range of motion and to provide therapeutic movement. The method produces lymphatic opening for both upper and lower body lymphoedema. The sequence of slow smooth exercises done with a slight resistance emulates manual lymphatic drainage, making this a useful tool for all lymphoedema specialists to be aware of. The classes provide a positive social atmosphere. This article provides an overview of The Lebed Method and informs community nurses about this novel treatment that is growing in popularity and is currently being used in a number of UK hospices.

KEY WORDS

Movement ◆ Music ◆ Lymphoedema ◆ MLD ◆ Palliative care

models; TLM works on the same principle and provides a good chance of improving lymphatic circulation.

Supporting evidence

Sandel et al (2005) carried out a pilot study using TLM in the treatment of breast cancer survivors. The study used a randomized controlled cross-over design. Women treated for breast cancer in the previous 5 years were recruited and randomly allocated to a 12 week exercise programme or a waiting list for 12 weeks, followed by the programme. The results collected at baseline, week 13 and 26 indicated that quality of life (measured using FACT-B version 3) and shoulder movement were improved in both groups. The authors recognized that the sample size was small (n=32) but felt there was sufficient evidence to encourage further research.

Hospice care

Williams (2008) identified that mixed classes of men and women of varied ages and health conditions have benefited both physically and mentally by attending TLM classes. The emphasis on slow smooth movements, with a lot of awareness on good breathing techniques and balance has identified, by self report, that patients have improved mobility, quality of life, and more self confidence. This has meant patients have remained independent in their own homes.

The classes held at Trinity Hospice in London have included a variety of health conditions including, prostate, lung, ovarian, breast and bowel cancer. Feedback always mentions the feel good factor experienced and the friendships that are made alongside the physical improvements. The classes at Trinity Hospice are currently being monitored by Measure Yourself Concerns and Wellbeing documentation (Patterson, 2003).

Trinity Hospice is not the only one using this model of supportive care, it has also been taken up by many other hospices and hospitals in the UK and Ireland. Recently St Mary's Hospice, Ullverston in Cumbria supported 12 nurses and therapists to train in TLM to deliver classes not just at the hospice but also within their rural community.

TLM can be taken into the community through patient support groups, health centres and doctor's surgeries. Carers are encouraged to participate in classes, helping to reduce their own stress levels, providing positive encouragement for patients to exercise and keeping their own bodies supple and strong to deal with the demands of their role.

Importantly, the Fountain Centre, Royal County Surrey Hospital, has funded the training for 8 MLD practitioners and therapists in order to fully integrate TLM into their service for cancer patients.

Summary

Community nurses need to be aware of TLM so they can refer a patient to a class in their locality, if appropriate. TLM is an effective and fun therapy in the management of cancer and non-cancer related lymphoedema, **BJCN**

Summary: Healthy Steps: Lebed Method class

A class is usually 1 hour in length, always commencing with the 10 upper body movements which create the opening lymphatic sequence. This can be followed by lower lymphatic leg exercises which are done seated. There are two water breaks followed by a series of different routines developing through the course which will run over 6–8 weeks.

Breathing is often taught by blowing bubbles as a prop. All exercises can be completed standing or seated, and a chair is always next to each participant, to use for routines as well as rest and balance.

There is a portfolio of movements which are always practised in the same way but the musical rhythm and props can vary. Upper body movement is slow and smooth with slight resistance, but leg movements are termed 'out of the box' and can be changed or can take a faster tempo if appropriate, they can always be done seated, even in a wheel chair.

All Lebed movements are approved by a medical team, prior to being included in the programme which is continually reviewed.

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Further information

Training programmes for TLM are held at frequent intervals at hospitals and hospices throughout the UK, and can be arranged for a specific group or hospital. The instructor training takes place over 24 contact hours, usually over 3 days with home study and a written and practical assessment.

Instructors are required to maintain their certification annually by completing 10 hours of continued professional development. Training is open to anyone with an aptitude; all health professionals, cancer survivors and movement specialists.

TLM was one of the first hospital-based programmes of its kind and one of the first published studies based on physical therapy and dance in the surgical management of breast cancer.

It is taught in more than 550 hospitals, cancer centres, fitness and community centres across the USA and other countries including, Canada, Korea, Indonesia, Australia, Puerto Rico, Mexico and the UK.

Further information on the Lebed Method is available at www.lebedmethod.com

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