

# Taking Healthy Steps in UHCW

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## Introduction

Patients who have had a diagnosis of cancer and undergone treatment such as surgery, chemotherapy, hormone therapy and radiotherapy, can experience altered body image, decreased range of movement, lymphoedema, and emotional distress.

There is a growing recognition amongst Health Care Professionals, that exercise plays a vital role in the physical, psychological, and emotional aspects of healing, (Sandal et al 2005). Healthy Steps is a programme which uses slow, smooth resisting, sequential exercises to open up the lymphatic system, promoting physical, emotional health and well being.

## History of Healthy Steps

Initially developed in the USA in 1980, for breast cancer care, and lymphoedema management, Healthy Steps is a therapeutic exercise which combines fun and laughter in the form of dance. The movements are a mixture of jazz, ballet, and modern dance set to a range of music and incorporating a variety of 'props', such as bubbles, top hats, canes, tutus, feather boas, and Hawaiian leis etc. Hospitals, palliative care units, and hospices are an ideal setting for Healthy Steps classes.

## Literature Review

Dancing can be traced back historically to ancient societies, and was linked to major life changes, worship, and medicine. (Sandel et al 2004). There are many theories which suggest that dancing can assist in the healing of illnesses, including cancer, by encompassing the individual's physical, emotional, cognitive and social integration, (Molinaro, Kleinfeld, & Lebed, 1986). There are numerous studies highlighting the benefits of physical activity and the effects on the increase of endorphins within the brain, creating feelings of well being, (Atkas & Ogce 2005). Whilst Fedirko et al (1985), found that dance orientated activities have increased in popularity and provides an enjoyable, physical and emotional outlet, resulting in a more positive self image as well as improving daily functions and developing a wider social network.

## Methodology

All participants have been diagnosed with cancer, some recently and are currently going through treatment, whilst others are post five years diagnosis. The class, mainly consisting of women, meet weekly in a gym on the site of UHCW NHS Trust. There is a rolling programme of 8 classes, with each session lasting one hour. Members can continue attending further programmes. The first exercise incorporates lymphatic opening movements and is mandatory, this is crucial for the successful outcome of the whole session and members are requested not to miss the first exercise of the lymphatic opening.

## Results

All participants have reported increase in range of movements, elevation of confidence, mood and body image. The group network with each other, supporting each others progress through their cancer journey.

## Conclusion

Healthy Steps is an innovative system of therapeutic movements and exercise to music, through fun and laughter. The exercises emulate Manual Lymphatic Drainage (MLD), helping to promote lymphatic flow, reducing the risk of developing lymphoedema, improving existing lymphoedema, increasing range of movement, helping to lighten mood and reducing anxiety.



.....since coming to Healthy Steps, I now have the confidence to go swimming. - Angela



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