

Dance Therapy in Dementia

We have had the following material for quite some time, but its publication has been continually pushed back for one reason or another. So we are pleased – at last – to be able to reprint these extracts from “*Dementia Now*”, the online newsletter of the Dementia Services Development Centre (DSDC), Stirling University, Scotland. In July 2009 they published a special issue on dance therapy in *Dementia Care*, Vol. 7, no. 6. The introduction to this issue was written by Heather Hill and is reprinted here by permission of the DSDC. They also kindly gave permission for their dmt resources section to be reproduced.

Dance Therapy

Heather Hill



Dr Heather Hill, Professional Member of the DTAA, has worked for over 20 years as a dance therapist. She worked with colleagues to create the curriculum for a dance therapy training program at RMIT, taught there for four years, and then at the Melbourne Institute for Experiential and Creative Arts Therapy (MIECAT). She has carried out a number of research projects and contributed numerous journal articles and book chapters. The second edition of her book “Invitation to the Dance: Dance for people with dementia and their carers”, published in 2009, was reviewed in the last issue of Moving On, p.66. Heather is currently involved in developing training programs for carers of people with dementia.

While music therapy in the context of aged care and dementia is probably well known and its benefits recognised, dance therapy is much less so. So any talk of dance therapy with people with dementia has to be prefaced by some description

Heather’s article gives a succinct and clear description of dance therapy and its particular contribution in the context of dementia care. This is something which dmts could usefully give to employers or professional colleagues, since it is always a challenge to find ways to explain our work which are simple and not too lengthy. The DTAA plans to include this in its dance therapy information and as part of a starter pack for new members.

See: www.dementia.stir.ac.uk

Website: www.dementia.stir.ac.uk

of what dance therapy is and in particular how “dance” can apply to therapeutic or health contexts.

The word “dance” can be scary to many people. In our Western society, dance is usually associated with highly developed dance techniques such as ballet - forms of dance usually undertaken by people with lithe, beautiful and inevitably young bodies. Whereas there is some sense that music has universal relevance for people, even if they do not have musical skills, we reserve dance for the skilled, the beautiful and the young! However, the dance of dance therapy relates to a much broader understanding of dance, one which harks back to the role of dance historically and in some non-Western cultures today, where dance was simply a part of human “being” – people danced in celebration and mourning, to teach the young, to come together in community. Dance from this perspective is a basic mode of human expression and communication – not just for specialists but for everyone!

The aesthetic qualities of dance are also important in dance therapy, those aspects which relate to feeling, to meaning-making and to quality of life. Dance has the capacity to take us beyond ourselves, to engage us in an alive and enlivening process.

Alongside this broad understanding of dance, is the basic philosophical assumption in dance therapy – an assumption which the scientific community via neuroscientific research are now coming to accept - that mind, feeling and body are

integrally connected. We are embodied beings; our interaction with the world is necessarily through our bodies. In working with the body, therefore, dance therapists are therefore working with all aspects of the person.

Hopefully, it will already have become apparent how dance therapy might be beneficial to people with dementia. The ability of people with dementia to express themselves or communicate through verbal/cognitive means is of course impaired, but there remains a whole area of affective being and experience – the person -- which the dance therapist can connect to.

Dance therapy in the context of dementia lies very much within a person-centred value system which is about acknowledging and supporting the personhood of the person with dementia. It is not about teaching dance or a pre-determined set of exercises, but about engaging with the person with dementia where he/she is at and facilitating a “conversation” in whatever way is possible for the person – through creative movement and dance, voice, music and music-making, props (e.g. scarves), and at times social dance (such as oldtime, Australian bush dance – and even rock ‘n’ roll!) – whatever works, whatever allows connection. Sometimes the sessions may be more reflective: relaxation, life enrichment through sensory experiences, reminiscence; other times it may be more active, and indeed more raucous!

What actually happens in a dance therapy session will vary from individual to individual, and group to group, as will the benefits. In general terms, there are benefits at all levels, cognitive, physical, emotional and social, within the session as well as after the sessions. In the session, the participants may become much more focussed and involved, and more coherent in their non-verbal (and even verbal) interactions and responses. Sometimes memories will arise. There are the physical benefits of moving, which also impact on the whole person. Rigid, closed up bodies are painful physically, but also emotionally and a person at ease in his/her body is likely to have a much greater sense of wellbeing. Dance therapy also facilitates positive social interactions – between therapist and person, and among the members of the group. Staff or family who participate in sessions may also gain a different, and more positive, view of the person with dementia and find more positive ways to connect to him or her. Naming the benefits separately as I have above in no way can capture the “magic” that can happen in the dance therapy space, the transformation from “patient” to PERSON. I leave the last word to one of my group participants who commented

on the dance therapy room “That small room gave us a whole lot of room to be ourselves.”

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The Stirling website also draws our attention to the reprint of Heather Hill’s book *Invitation to the Dance (2009) 2nd Edition*. It promotes the book as providing “guidance for anyone who would like to help people with dementia move expressively to music. It gives suggestions for approaches, props and music and provides vivid descriptions of the difference that dance can make to people's wellbeing. It includes a 6-track CD of music used by the author in her dance therapy sessions with people with dementia”. As stated above, it was reviewed in the last issue of *Moving On* by Donna Newman-Bluestein and a second review by a member of the DTAA will be published in the next issue.

We are also pleased to have permission from Stirling to publish the following web resources for students and practitioners interested in working with people with dementia. This is followed by an excellent reading list on Dance Therapy for people with dementia.

Dance Therapy Web Resources

Offered by Stirling University

See: www.dementia.stir.ac.uk for more details.

Let's Dance to Health

Dancing can be magical and transforming. It can breathe new life into a tired soul; make a spirit soar; unleash locked-away creativity; unite generations and cultures; inspire new romances or rekindle old ones; trigger long-forgotten memories; and turn sadness into joy, if only during the dance.

http://www.aarp.org/health/fitness/get_motivated/lets_dance_to_health.html

Leisure activities and the risk of dementia in the elderly

The authors examined the relation between leisure activities and the risk of dementia in a prospective cohort of subjects older than 75 years of age who resided in the community and did not have dementia at base line.

<http://content.nejm.org/cgi/content/full/348/25/2508>

Dance therapy for Alzheimer's disease

The authors consider a novel approach to the most common form of dementia.

<http://archive.student.bmj.com/issues/09/03/education/112.php>

Cognitive and behavioural effects of music-based exercises in patients with dementia

This study aimed to evaluate the effect of a musical exercise programme on mood state and cognitive function in women with dementia.

http://www.isprm.com/Education/Guidelines/PT_Alzheimer's%20Disease/Exercises_AD06.pdf

Dancing with persons with dementia

A how-to guide to communicating and dance/movement therapy with people with dementia.

http://dancetherapymusings.typepad.com/musings_of_a_dancemovement/2009/06/dancing-with-persons-with-dementia.html

Why ballroom dancing is good for you: physically and mentally

This article explains how dancing can keep older people active and may help to prevent dementia.

<http://www.timeoutdance.com/alzheimers.html>

What is dance movement therapy?

Dance Movement Therapy is the psychotherapeutic use of movement and dance through which a person can engage creatively in a process to further their emotional, cognitive, physical and social integration.

<http://www.admt.org.uk/whatis.html>

Fascinating body: movement and the brain

Movement promotes the building of connections in the brain and the growth of new brain cells.

<http://www.jabadao.org/fascinating.html>

And, also for the interest of readers, the excellent Reading List on Dance Therapy provided by Stirling:

Dance Therapy Reading List

Hill, H. (2009). Dancing with hope: dance therapy with people with dementia. In S. Chaiklin and H. Wengrower, *The art and science of dance/movement therapy: Dance is life*. Routledge.

Dayanim, Soshana

The acute effects of a specialised movement programme on the verbal abilities of patients with late-stage dementia. *Alzheimer's care today*. 10(2), April-June 2009, 93-98.

This study provides an initial investigation of the possible cognitive effects of a specialised exercise programme for people with late-stage Alzheimer's disease.

Greenland, Penny

Dance: five-minute love affairs.

The journal of dementia care. 17(1), January/February 2009, 30-31.

The author shares lessons learned from many years of enjoying dance and movement with people with dementia - and introduces a new course which brings together this learning.

Heymanson, Cynthia

Linking hands in circle dance.

The journal of dementia care. 17(1), January/February 2009, 13-14.

The author explains how circle dancing, a traditional form of dance from many countries can benefit people with dementia.

Lamont, Jack

Remembering the dance.

The journal of dementia care. 16(2), March/April 2008, 11. Carer Jack Lamont celebrates his wife Daphne's enjoyment of dancing, and describes their contribution to raising public awareness of dementia.

Stacey, Gemma

Dancing to keep young@heart.

Mental health practice. 11(6), March 2008, 34-38.

The authors report on an evaluation of a dance project set up for older people in a small former coalmining village in Nottinghamshire.

Levine-Madori, Linda.

Therapeutic thematic arts programming for older adults

Baltimore: Health Professions Press, c2007.

Actively engage older adults and help preserve their cognitive functioning using this innovative, integrative approach to therapeutic art and recreation. Use Therapeutic Thematic Arts Programming to create an enriching environment that effectively meets older adults' cognitive, emotional, physical and social needs. In a clearly outlined nine-step process, Therapeutic Thematic Arts Programming involves exploring a broad theme through a range of artistic expressions, including music, dance, poetry, sculpture and photography. Stimulating all areas of brain functioning, the TTAP method promotes older adults' creativity and encourages them to exercise their remaining strengths and abilities. The approach also increases social interaction with its focus on dynamic group interaction.

Ross, Fiona

Company of Elders. Working with older people.

11(4), 2007, 37-40. The author, Head of Connect at Sadler's Wells, explains the phenomenal success of the Company of Elders, a dance and performance group for older people.

Nadasen, Krishnavelli Kathleen

"We are too busy being active and enjoying ourselves to feel the aches and pains". perceived health benefits of line dancing for older women. *Quality in ageing*. 8(3), September 2007, 4-14. This paper examines the perceived benefits of line dancing for a group of women between 60 and 80 years of age. It is based on a one-year qualitative research study in Cape Town, South Africa. Line dancing has been classified as a form of aerobic exercise and this study sought to investigate whether these older women perceived line dancing to be beneficial to their health and well-being.

Arts Council England

Dance and health. The benefits for people of all ages. London: Arts Council England, 2006. In England an increasing number of people lead sedentary lifestyles and rates of obesity are rising. The need to improve levels of physical activity and develop healthier lifestyles has never been more pressing. The Government has provided leadership and guidance on making healthier choices but if people are to make positive decisions about improving their health and well-being they need to be able to choose from a range of suitable options.

Hill, Heather

A dance therapy perspective. In M. Marshall and K. Allan (Eds.), *Dementia: Walking not wandering: Fresh approaches to understanding and practice*. London: Hawker Publications, 2006. This chapter looks at walking behaviour in people with dementia from the perspective of a dance therapist.

Houston, Sarah

Dancing towards youthfulness. *Working with older people*. 9(2), June 2005, 15-17. Article on how research shows that older people, whatever their physical condition, can take part in dance and may reap benefits from their participation.

O'Maille, Tria Thomson

Touching the spirit at the end of life. *Alzheimer's care quarterly*. 6(1), January/March 2005, 62-70. Mindful affective stimulation (MAT) dance/movement therapy (DMT) is a holistic group psychotherapy process for persons in end-stage dementia. Centred in Tom Kitwood's philosophy of person-centred care, this process uses elements of dance/movement therapy.

Bunce, Jill

Mary and Martha: dance movement with the elderly. *Generations review*. 14(2), April 2004, 20-21.

Special issue on creativity. A personal account of a dance movement therapist's work. *Group work and aging: issues in practice, research, and education* / Binghamton, NY: Haworth Social Work Practice Press, c2004. This book discusses in-depth information on group work with gay and lesbian elders, caregivers, elders with Alzheimer's disease, service providers, special populations such as Vietnamese and Latino/a elders, and provides information on the use of expressive therapies like art, drama, and dance.

Wood, Kevin

Creativity and dementia : opening new horizons. *Signpost*. 8(3), February 2004, 21-23. Describes a range of creative arts which help the person with dementia live a fulfilled life in the community. Activities included creative writing, social dancing, and the development of a memory/sensory garden. Jenkins, Susan.

Just your cup of tea.

Working with older people. 7(4), December 2003, 21-24. Describing how social dance can help to support intellectual, emotional and motor functions in older people with mental health problems.

Hill, Heather

A space to be myself. *Signpost* 7 (3), 37-39 Describes a phenomenologic research study into the experience of dance therapy for a person with dementia.

Kindell, Jackie

Doing things differently: dance in dementia care. *The journal of dementia care*. 11(2), Mar/Apr 2003, 18-20. The authors discuss how their original dance sessions with people with dementia have combined exercise with creative expression.

Cooper, Lesley

Growing old gracefully: social dance in the third age. *Ageing and society*. 22(6), November 2002, 689-708. Examines the meaning of social dancing for older people. Based on a one-year qualitative research project to explore the experiences of social dance for people aged 60 years or more who attend various dance events in Essex and south-east London.

Moriarty, Jo

Innovative practice. *Dementia*. 1(3), October 2002, 383-395. Explores three different interventions aimed at improving our understanding of individual responses to dementia - support groups, dance movement therapy, and Snoezelen therapy.

Rosler, Alexander

Skill learning in patients with moderate Alzheimer's disease: a prospective pilot-study of waltz-lessons. *International journal of geriatric psychiatry*. 17(12), December 2002, 1155-1156. Research letter reporting the effect of a 12-day prospective, blinded dance-learning trial in 5 patients with moderate Alzheimer's disease and 5 age-matched depressed patients. Patients with AD showed a significant effect in procedural learning whereas depressed patients did not.

Arts therapies and progressive illness: nameless dread / Hove, East Susses; New York, NY: Brunner-Routledge , 2002.

Guide to the use of arts therapies in the treatment of patients with diseases such as Parkinson's and Alzheimer's. In the last few years arts therapies have been used in an increasingly wide range of applications, such as in palliative care, or with people with learning difficulties. Covers art therapy, dance movement therapy and music therapy.

Shustik, L.R. and Thompson, Tria (2001).

Dance/movement therapy: Partners in personhood. In A. Innes and K. Hatfield (Eds.), *Healing arts therapies and person-centered dementia care*. London: Jessica Kingsley, 2001. Central and Cecil Housing Trust "It's wonderful what happens in this room" Compton Lodge green candle dance project Richmond: Central and Cecil Housing Trust, 2001. A brief account of the Green Candle Dance Project undertaken at Compton Lodge, one of the care homes run by Central and Cecil Housing Trust. Some of those involved have dementia. An example of an innovative activities project involving dance and music.

Coaten, Richard

Exploring reminiscence through dance and movement. *The journal of dementia care*. 9(5), September/October 2001, 19-22. Looks at the difference arts based activities in dementia care can make to the communication skills of people with dementia. Dance may free up expression and develop abilities in special ways.

Music therapy in dementia care.

London : Jessica Kingsley, 2000.

Takes a comprehensive look at music therapy as a means of improving memory, health and identity in those with dementia. Written with carers and families of people with dementia in mind as well as music therapists. Chapters cover working with narratives, singing, agitation, music therapy practice, improvisation as an assessment in early dementia, creativity, remembering and forgiving, images and recollection, and dance movement.

Hill, Heather

Dance therapy and communication in dementia. *Signpost*. 4(1), May. 1999, 13-14. Describes how dance and movement may assist in the expression of emotion and feelings and therefore aid better communication with people with dementia.

Killick, John

The arts in dementia care: touching the human spirit. *The journal of dementia care*. 7(5), 1999, 33-37. Investigates the benefits of the visual and verbal arts, from painting and writing to dance. Second of three articles on the use of the arts in dementia care.

Perrin, Tessa

Lifted into a world of rhythm and melody. *The journal of dementia care*. 6(1), January 1998, 22-24. Relates the experience of a 'Jabadao' session, combining dance and movement, with people with dementia. Describes the effects on wellbeing and the importance of the qualities of the therapist.

Chavin, Melanie

The lost chord: reaching the person with dementia through the power of music.

Bicester: Winslow Press, 1997.

Useful book written by a music therapist about the power of music to help people with dementia. The first part looks at the particular needs of people with dementia and the second part suggests music activities appropriate for individuals at different stages of progression through dementia. Covers common behaviours, wandering, over stimulation, communication, use of cues, person centred programmes, music groups, reminiscence, games, sensory stimulation groups, walking and dancing, lower and higher functioning groups.

Crichton, Sandy

Moving is the language I use, communication is my goal.

The journal of dementia care. 5(6), Nov/Dec 1997, 16-17. Describes the work of JABADAO company which give movement based work with elderly people in residential settings. Dance, an everyday, continuous, spontaneous movement and body language is used to create opportunities for non-verbal communication.

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