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Tai Chi as a meditative movement therapy for persistent pain: An exploratory workshop

Background: Persistent pain is a complex biopsychosocial condition that despite research efforts and innovative interventions remains a prevalent, disabling and costly challenge. It exacts a significant health burden in regards to quality of life costs (e.g. organic pathology and pain, psychological and psychosocial factors) as well as direct (medical) and indirect (economic workforce) costs. As such, management of persistent pain requires a psychologically-informed interprofessional collaborative 5-step approach to optimize management.

Description: Meditative movement therapy (MMT), a new category of exercise, defined by: 1) some form of movement or body positioning, 2) a focus on breathing and 3) a calm state of mind with the goal of deep states of relaxation will be discussed as a physical therapy mind-body intervention for the management of persistent MSK pain. Tai Chi chuan is a form of MMT that may be beneficial in the clinical management of persons with chronic pain.

Clinical Application: A simplified version of Yang-style Tai Chi (Tai Chi Fundamentals® Program) that has been used clinically by the presenter in both individual and group physical therapy will be described. Tai Chi mind-body principles and guidelines for Tai Chi practice will be outlined. Specific Tai Chi movement patterns and their therapeutic, biomechanical and functional implications for the management of persistent pain will be delineated.

Importance to Audience: American College Sports Medicine (ACSM) guidelines for the management of persons with chronic pain calls for aerobic exercise, strength training, mobility exercises (range of motion and flexibility) and functional neuromuscular (balance) exercise. The Tai Chi Fundamentals® Program is a medical model Tai Chi program developed in collaboration with physical therapists that can readily meet these exercise recommendations. It utilizes a neurodevelopmental progression, and as such, is accessible to clients of all ages and functional abilities. As a MMT, Tai Chi has been shown to convincingly positive evidence for fall prevention and improvement of psychological health, as well as associated health benefits for many chronic health conditions (e.g. musculoskeletal and neurologic conditions, cardiovascular health, bone density, muscle strength and pain). As a MMT, Tai Chi is one example of a broad range of self-management mind-body exercise programs that may be beneficial for persons with persistent pain.

Biography

Kristine M Hallisy, PT, DSc, OCS, CMPT is an Assistant Professor at the University of WI-Madison Doctor of Physical Therapy Program. Her teaching responsibilities include musculoskeletal coursework, health promotion and wellness, orthotics and prosthetics. She received a Bachelor of Science degree in Physical Therapy from the University of Wisconsin-Madison (1984), a Master of Science in Kinesiology from the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor (1992) and a Doctorate of Science in Physical Therapy from Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan (2011). Her clinical appointment includes patient care at University Health Services (student health) and professional staff development at UW-Health Princeton Club East Outpatient PT Clinic. She serves as a faculty member, instructor and Director of Mentoring for the Post-Professional Orthopaedic Clinical Residency Program offered at the UW-Health and Meriter hospitals. She provides service to the Wisconsin Physical Therapy Association (WPTA) as a member of the WPTA Board of Directors, Co-Chair of the Health Promotion and Wellness Committee and special liaison to the WPTA Continuing Education Committee.

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