

Teaching Qi Gong in the NHS

There are many challenges to teaching Qi Gong in an NHS settings, however it can be a rewarding and fulfilling experience.

I started teaching Qi Gong 2 years ago to a very specific group of patients. All had suffered nerve injuries to the upper limb resulting in the loss of use of at least one hand. Most were injured as a result of road traffic accidents and were months or even years ahead in terms of their rehabilitation.

Commonly, pain and problems with proprioception (knowing where your limb or hand is in space) were on-going, alongside the daily challenges of living 'one-handed'.

Often traditional Physiotherapy, although effective, resulted in more pain. Relaxation and natural pain management techniques have always been high on the Therapists agenda. In particular visualisation and deep breathing were taught.

I wanted to introduce Qi Gong as it offered a way of working with the breath, using visualisation and focusing on the body (commonly the hands and feet) in space. It also seemed like a gentler and more sustainable practice than Physiotherapy. So it seemed to tick more than one box. I have experienced the effect of Qi Gong on pain for myself and know that it is a useful mix of distraction and mindfulness.

I also felt that Qi Gong was a way of returning to other forms of exercise – evidence re Co/O2 balance, confidence

Popular pain management pathways are embracing this mix of accepting discomfort and distraction oneself from the pain – realising that doing only one of these is exhausting.

The cohort of patients came from all over the country and I usually have a maximum of 2 half hour slots with them! The idea of explaining the traditional Chinese medical 'roots' of Qi Gong very quickly went out of the window in favour of adapted posture and simple breathing and focussing on an image to anchor the mind (for example: the hands float up as if to the top of a body of water). Sometimes we would only get as far as movement 3 in an 18 movement form and often, due to injury, this movement was barely recognisable given the adaptation to the original form that was needed.

Patients were given a DVD (more recently a You Tube link), a handout and a link to Tai Chi and Qi Gong Teacher websites to encourage local searches for classes.

Within the NHS Trust, other Therapy teams have become interested and I now run 2 regular groups with one more in the pipeline.