Qi Gong in an NHS Setting by Sally Ibbotson MRSS

After qualifying as a Shiatsu Practitioner in 2000, I was lucky enough to attend a Teacher Training course in Qi Gong Shibashi taught by the late Chris Jarmey.

The experience was both enjoyable and useful - after the course I almost immediately got work teaching Qi Gong in local residential care homes and within the community. I also teach at festivals, corporate events and offer private classes.

In 2010, following a change of circumstances, I started working part-time in an NHS Trust with a team of Occupational Therapists. My main role is offering pain management to patients with long-term upper limb injuries.

Initially I saw this job as separate from my private business but I quickly spotted that Qi Gong could be immensely useful for these patients. My team agreed and I now offer Qi Gong lessons to one or more patients as part of my working day.

Other teams at the hospital expressed interest and my NHS Trust is now paying for my Diploma in ‘Tai Chi for Rehabilitation’, on the basis that I’ll use what I learn to teach others and set up groups.

I thought it might be useful to outline the process I used to get Qi Gong onto the Trust’s Agenda!

I talked informally to everyone I met - colleagues, cleaners, consultants. The most unlikely people will have heard of Tai Chi, or may have done martial arts, which opens a conversation.

I gathered evidence and did a literature search. Holistic thinking and quality of life concerns are high on the NHS agenda now - if you talk about lowering stress levels, pain management and overall wellbeing, people will want to know more.

I prepared a PowerPoint presentation. It’s fairly easy to find research evidence about the benefits of Qi Gong and Tai Chi and I used this to make my points.

I designed an Outcome Measure document to assess, e.g. patients’ sleep, mobility, ease of breathing and pain, before and after receiving lessons. Even if you don’t plan a formal research project, it is really good to develop the discipline of collecting evidence. I’ve often used my findings to illustrate the usefulness of Qi Gong for rehabilitation.

I visited an NHS Trust where Qi Gong was already being taught, to see how they approached the classes and how they collected Outcome Measures.

I talked more formally to teams I wished to target (e.g. Physiotherapists and Occupational Therapists) – plus Rheumatology Consultants and pain management specialists. I asked for 5 minutes at their meetings or offered an in-service training - failing that I just spoke to them in the corridor!

Once given opportunities to present my skills, I always included a practical session - even if it was only one or two moves. In good weather I would
always go outside…

I presented my ideas to our Research and Development department. They suggested a pilot study to assess interest and invited me to come back when I had collected figures for 6 months. So my pilot study is up and running! Many patients continue to benefit and therapists are referring in to my sessions. I am very grateful for the opportunity to bring this wonderful, adaptable, regenerative practice one step further into mainstream healthcare.