Healthy-Steps Exercise Programme

By Jackie Buller, MFHT, and Janet Capstick, MFHT

Jackie and Janet provide an overview of the Healthy-Steps Exercise Programme aiming to introduce a new and exciting therapy and to supplement knowledge.

They are both co-directors of Timeless Partnership and are Healthcare Practitioners, qualified in many complementary therapies, and Healthy-Steps Trainers (CLMT)

What is Healthy-Steps?

Healthy-Steps (previously known as The Lebed Method), is a programme of movement and dance that has been actively practised for more than thirty years and has benefited thousands, internationally.

Medically driven and monitored, Healthy-Steps operate in 700 countries, providing an innovative wellness programme for distinct populations. Traditional physiotherapy movements are taken out of clinical settings and integrated with gentle modern ballet and Pilates moves. Set to music, these exercise sequences are designed to help the clients’ physical and emotional well-being. Anyone can participate - from young adults to seniors - regardless of health, age or ability level. The movements can be carried out standing, seated, in a bed and even in water! There is a specialised Creative Rhythms programme for children.

Exercise and movement meets Sumba!

The programme is designed to aid in the recovery and maintenance of patients, adults and children living with chronic illnesses - including cancer and Lymphoedema - and those with surgical complications. In addition, both seniors and pregnant women can widely benefit from the Programme and the sense of community that it engenders.

Healthy-Steps is specifically designed to allow individuals who are restricted to sedentary lifestyles, or who are otherwise unlikely to participate in traditional programmes, to benefit from a programme of exercise and socialisation.

Specially selected music stimulates participants to move more freely than they normally would. It redirects their minds away from pain and limitation, and instead towards feeling the movement through the music.

Healthy-Steps can be used as a group ‘wellness programme’ or, where appropriate, in a one-to-one setting.

The group setting also allows clients to see improvement in the physical abilities of others, which helps to reinforce their own possibilities.

All instructors have to be certified, registered and have ongoing support from the Healthy-Steps medical board for queries regarding the clients’ medical history and appropriate exercises.
When and where did it originate?

Healthy-Steps (formerly The Lebed Method) originated in North America in 1980. It was formulated by two physicians, Doctors Mark and Joel Lebed, partnered by Sherry Lebed-Davis, a dance professional with her own dance studios for adults and children. Her dance company performed both in the United States and internationally. She became a Dance Movement Therapist with the Lebed Method in 1980 while at Albert Einstein Medical Centre.

Sherry has received the Governors Award in Dance Excellence for working with children and is recognised by major cancer and lymphoedema groups. She is one of the foremost authorities on the use of movement for the healing and prevention of complications from breast cancer surgery, all cancers, and chronic illness.

Initially developed for Breast Cancer Care and lymphoedema management, the programme has been modified and broadened. Since 2000, the exercise base now encompasses movements which can help individuals cope with many other chronic conditions.

In 2005, The Lebed Method was introduced to the UK by Canadian, Rosemary Kelly. In 2009, the name changed to ‘Healthy-Steps - moving you to better health with the Lebed Method’ - in order to modernise, update, and move further into servicing a wider population.

The programme has been acknowledged and is widely respected by the medical profession. High-profile names such as Dr. Susan M. Love, and Saskia R.J. Thiadens, executive director of The National Lymphoedema Network USA, have endorsed the programme, and it is employed in a range of hospitals, cancer and Parkinson’s support centres, residential care and hospices within the UK.

Healthy-Steps was one of the first hospital-based programmes of its kind and one of the first published studies based on physical therapy and dance in the surgical management of breast cancer.

This programme is a perfect addition for medical centres, hospitals, residential/nursing homes, and support groups. It could also encompass exercise and fitness centres, dance and yoga centres, religious centres, etc.

To quote Marc R. Lebed” MD. MDR Medical Director, Healthy Steps

“As the Medical Director for Healthy-Steps, I fully support and promote the Programme as a substantiated therapeutic option for all patients living with infirmity. Healthy-Steps is an excellent adjunct to traditional physical, occupational and lymphoedema therapies. The Programme is clearly superior, for its target population; to most if not all traditional exercise programs and its movements are documented to be safe and productive for the physical and emotional health of all participants, including the chronically ill.

“The Programme has stood the test of time and continues to evolve and flourish”.

Taken from conference Chicago. March 2009.
Who can benefit?

Anyone recovering from or affected by:

- Arthritis
- Autism
- Breast cancer, or other forms of cancer
- Chemotherapy
- Chronic fatigue syndrome
- Diabetes
- Fibromyalgia
- Frozen shoulder
- General fitness issues
- Lymphoedema - control and prevention
- Multiple sclerosis
- Muscular dystrophy
- Parkinson’s disease
- Radiotherapy
- Surgery
- Other chronic or debilitating illnesses

What are the benefits?

As clients/patients progress through the Healthy-Steps programme, most will see significant improvement in the following ways:

- Improve/regain overall range of motion
- Assist in structurally re-balancing the body
- Particularly helpful in increasing upper body mobility
- Increase flexibility, strength and energy
- Help in preventing and reducing swelling from oedema and lymphoedema
- Reduces pain and depression
- Reduces frozen shoulder
- Overall posture improvement
- Improvement of self image and esteem
- Improvement in quality of life and well-being
- Weight stabilization
- Empowerment.

And it is FUN

Specialised Healthy-Steps classes are also available for:

- General wellness programmes
- Senior health and wellness
- Maternity programmes
- Aquatic exercise
- Adults with autism.
Creative Rhythms – Children’s Programme

A child’s need to play and just ‘be’ a child is often forgotten when they are ill, due to surgery, cancer treatments, other forms of chronic illness or emotional disabilities. Exercises will help them retain muscle mass, move their lymphatic fluid, help with circulation, fatigue, depression... and often bring laughter and fun back to their lives.

Deeply concerned about these children - and those who could be taking on a ‘carer’s role’ in family life - Sherry Lebed-Davis and Dr Marc Lebed developed a similar programme to the original adult programme, adapting it to fit the needs of these children whilst accomplishing the same successful outcome.

The simple regime found within ‘The Lebed Method - Creative Rhythms’ is tailored to help relieve pain, restore flexibly, improve the immune system (by working and moving the lymphatic system) and develop balance, all in a very fun programme. It allows children to be children.

Healthy-Steps Trainers/Instructors

Currently there are only four qualified Healthy-Steps trainers (CLMT) in the UK and approximately 90 registered instructors (CLM). However, with the acceptance and confidence being built in the Healthy-Steps programme by the NHS, lymphoedema services, nursing and residential homes, hospices, and cancer support centres - to name but a few - the number of instructors is steadily growing. New training courses are being organised across the UK and trainee instructors come from many professional groups, including breast cancer specialists, lymphoedema nurses, Macmillan Lymphoedema CNS, physiotherapists, and yoga teachers. There are also trainees who are MLD practitioners, complementary therapists, movement specialists and cancer survivors.

To remain on the Healthy-Steps register, annual membership renewal is mandatory. In addition, 10 hours CPD in a related field must be fulfilled. Along with many other benefits, this ensures approved practice and current knowledge of movements is regularly updated.

For the therapist, many clients present with stress-related symptoms or chronic health problems, affecting them both physically and mentally. Combined with their traditional therapies, Healthy-Steps exercise movements can assist practitioners in offering their clients a more comprehensive, effective, and up-to-date service.
Want to find out more?

Training courses are being held across the UK. For information on a training course near you, please e-mail Jackie Buller or Janet Capstick at healthystepstraining@yahoo.co.uk

Jackie and Janet qualified as Healthy-Steps Instructors, under Julia Williams, in November 2007, and completed their Healthy-Steps Teacher Trainer qualification studying with Sherry Lebed Davis, in Seattle, July 2010. They hold Healthy-Steps classes in the West Midlands, Shropshire and Worcestershire and have successfully gained contracts with lymphoedema services, the NHS, Parkinsons’ groups, and residential and nursing Homes. Two pilot studies for the NHS have been completed, which are awaiting publication.

Over the years, the Healthy-Steps/ Lebed Method programme has had worldwide research studies and articles published, and have been prominent on TV chat shows.

Below is a small selection of related publications:


- Sherry Lebed-Davis has published a book, ‘Thriving after Breast Cancer’, two DVDs and a music CD.