

The Birmingham News

Lebed Method uses music, gentle ballet, jazz movements

Monday, March 03, 2008

ANNA VELASCO
News staff writer

Blowing bubbles may seem like pure whimsy. But it can be therapeutic, too. Just ask participants in Elizabeth Vander Kamp's exercise classes at the Lakeshore Foundation.

Vander Kamp begins her dance movement class and multiple sclerosis aquatics class by blowing bubbles to improve circulation of the lymphatic system and reduce swelling in the legs and arms. The technique is one of several that she incorporates from an exercise program known as the Lebed Method, Focus on Healing Through Movement and Dance.

"Everybody feels so ridiculous blowing bubbles, but they do it," said Vander Kamp, who got certified teaching the method last year. "It's fun. I think it's a great healing treatment."

The Lebed Method began in 1980. Brothers Marc and Joel Lebed, both obstetrician-gynecologists, collaborated with their sister Sherry Lebed Davis, a dancer, to come up with something to ease the pain and depression of their mother, who was suffering from breast cancer treatment.

The regimen uses gentle ballet and jazz movements in tempo with music to exercise limbs, improve balance and improve circulation of the lymphatic system, which can be impaired after cancer, surgery, radiation or other illness. Bubbles, boas and laughter inject sensuality and merriment.

"Anyone can do it," said Davis, president of Lebed Method, Focus on Healing. "You don't have to be graceful. It's so much fun that you don't even realize it's therapeutic. It's a hoot."

Davis, who also had breast cancer, said the regimen increases your energy level and reduces depression. The journal "Cancer Nursing" published a study in 2005 showing significant quality-of-life improvement in breast cancer patients who took Lebed classes.

Although the techniques were originally designed for breast cancer patients during and after treatment, they have been effective in relieving symptoms for men and women from a variety of ills including other types of cancer, lymphedema, MS, Parkinson's disease, fibromyalgia, frozen shoulder, chronic fatigue and arthritis. Creative rhythms classes target children with cancer.

Claudia Charme, who suffers from MS, said she has better function in her legs after her aquatic classes at Lakeshore using the Lebed warm-up.

"I've noticed a difference," she said.

Vander Kamp is the only certified Lebed instructor practicing in Alabama, although the Lakeshore Foundation hopes to generate enough interest among exercise instructors to hold a three-day Lebed training course this year. More than 600 people in 12 countries are certified instructors.

Lakeshore Foundation also is considering having a full Lebed class this spring, not just incorporating parts of the method in other classes. The class would be one hour long, with two 10-minute breaks. Those breaks are an important component because they allow for the social support from fellow classmates, Vander Kamp said.

Vander Kamp said she hopes the Lebed Method catches on in Birmingham and the state.

"It's fun and scientifically based and is good for so many diagnostic groups," she said.