

6th World Nursing and Healthcare Conference

August 15-17, 2016 London, UK

Falling on your feet: A dance for health programme for people aged 65+, an evaluation

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Falling and fear of falling are not inevitable conditions of later life but may have serious negative health impacts. In the UK, falls in older people cost the National Health Service (NHS) approximately £4.6 million pounds per day and with an ageing population, this is a concern. Many older adults know about effective falls prevention such as strength and balance exercise classes, but drop out rates are high. Perceived negative stereotyping of ageing, decline and falls, may also lead some older people to restrict daily activity, stay indoors and remain fearful of falling. Dance can improve balance and increase strength and overall confidence, cornerstones of effective falls prevention. Dance is sociable, and in the UK, has enjoyed a revival through popular TV programmes such as 'Strictly Come Dancing'. There is growing evidence of the physical activity benefits of dancing in later life, but more need to be known about its wider health benefits, particularly on fear of falling and social isolation. This paper presents the evaluation findings of a 12 week, twice weekly, dance intervention for people 65 years and over, led by Helix Arts, NE England, with choreographer and dancer, Nadia Ifkhar and funded by NHS England. The evaluation was carried out by Northumbria University and discussion groups, interviews, and professional dancer feedback, captured participants' self reported benefits. Key questions focused on what participants valued about the sessions and whether regular dancing, engendered feeling safer and less fearful of falling. Longer term, the evaluation considers the value of dancing and maintaining a healthier and socially connected older age.

Biography

Bailey C, PhD, is a Senior Research Fellow in International Ageing, at the Department of Public Health and Wellbeing, Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK. Her interests broadly encompass participatory approaches to working with older people, to develop preventative, enabling and cost effective, services and supports. She has managed and supported international and national research projects including those focusing on: health technologies and older adults; social aspects of falls and older adults; creating dementia friendly communities and intergenerational understanding of health and well being. She has collaborated within large multidisciplinary and cross sector research teams and is widely published.

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