

Tai Chi and Cardiac Rehab

It was quite a novel proposition. Was I interested in joining a class learning the ancient art of Tai Chi? Not a decision I normally make when buying my morning paper but there she was – Mairi Smail, Cardiac Physiotherapist, was blocking my route out of the shop. I think that I readily accepted, but not quite knowing what I had agreed to I was able to remember watching the '70s television series Kung Fu, featuring a very young David Carradine, and had visions of being a mature 'Grasshopper' (an unreserved apology to those who haven't got a clue what I'm talking about!).

I joined another eleven eager participants of varying ages and physical ability at Cardiac Rehab, Cluden, for that first session as Mairi explained the programme and we got down to business. Eighteen elements would complete this particular schedule of instruction. Each session would build on the previous until all the moves were learned. But first, a leisurely warm-up accompanied by some appropriate 'soft' tai chi music.

The moves themselves were carried out gently, even slowly, to achieve maximum benefit, and when correctly performed gained the desired effect. Each person would work within their own ability to a level they felt comfortable.

We were introduced to some wonderful sounding moves including:

- Waterfall
- Spring and Autumn
- Catch the Moon
- Painting a Rainbow
- Rotating Flywheel
- Cloud Hands, and the curiously named
- Repulse Monkey

At the conclusion of each instruction was a period of quiet standing or relaxation by which time I did indeed feel relaxed, to the point on more than one occasion of nearly falling asleep on my feet!

My appetite was well and truly whetted. I waited each week with eager anticipation wondering what would come next and on the rare occasion I was unable to attend a particular session I somehow felt deprived.

Each Friday developed and as the weeks progressed as an addition to the instruction a small social gathering grew.

Twelve sessions later and the instruction complete the question on everyone's mind was of what comes next? With summer approaching some took the decision to leave the group and pursue other activities. Others were given the opportunity to continue with the exercises in Cluden on a non supervised basis. We would run each session ourselves with individual members taking turn to lead the group through the exercises. Not everyone wanted to take the lead role and their wishes were accepted. There were enough volunteers happy to take each session.

Six of the original twelve remained forming the Tai Chi Maintenance Group and continue to meet. Most are able to make the session each week.

What of the future? The word on the grapevine is that there is an intention to run another novice group along similar lines to ours. In due course those attendees, whoever they may be, will 'graduate' and be welcome to join the Maintenance Group.

This is clearly not Tai Chi for the purist. The programme was designed for use by those who have suffered cardiac events or have heart related issues and who have been cared for through Cardiac Rehabilitation. There may even be an opportunity to further develop the exercises in the Maintenance Group sessions and that is something that could be researched in the future. For the moment and from my perspective this particular venture has been a resounding success and one I hope to continue.