

Tai Chi and Health

In Britain, there is increasing pressure on teachers of arts such as Tai Chi Chuan to acquire certification and to move towards a more professional model of practice. In the healthcare arena this becomes more pressing as the government moves towards greater regulation of the complementary therapies and alternative medical systems.

Tai Chi Chuan and Chi Kung are internal forms of exercise that are rooted in the ancient healing arts of China including meditation, healing and martial traditions. They integrate relaxation, meditation, breathing and postural techniques that help us develop balancing and harmonious movements; the full system can



include individual exercises, flowing sequences, or forms (both open handed and with various weapons) partner work and meditation. Because of the emphasis on developing and harmonising internal structure, circulation and energy rather than muscular force, these arts can be practised by people of all ages, types and abilities, even those who might be prevented from joining in with other activities and they can be adapted to suit a wide range of needs. They are commonly practised for stress relief, good health, and meditation or as martial arts, or any combination of these.

There is a wide range of styles and approaches to these arts but all of them share the common principles listed above. They are practised extensively as therapeutic exercise across the world and are increasingly in demand for use in institutions such as hospitals. It is vital that tai chi and chi kung be made accessible to people who may be excluded from other forms of exercise recovery programmes. By emphasising basic principles rather than external forms, movements can be adapted to meet the needs of people who have a wide range of capabilities, including those who might be confined to wheelchairs or beds. Once learnt and adapted to particular needs, individuals can safely practise these principles as a basis for a healthy lifestyle.