

5000 West



For employees, volunteers and patients of Zablocki and our community clinics
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Photo by Brian Walker

Tai Chi



Master trainer Pat Corrigan Culotti teaches tai chi moves to Milwaukee VA staff members.

Ancient philosophy meets modern medicine to treat battlefield injuries

BY BRIAN WALKER
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Ancient philosophies are meeting cutting edge medical care at the Milwaukee VA where the Polytrauma Support Clinic team is using tai chi to treat those with traumatic injuries.

The treatment is part of a grant the VA received to see how using the ancient martial arts can help Veterans recover from traumatic injuries.

“We’re very excited about this because it shows a lot of promise, especially for those Veterans with Post Traumatic Stress,” said Mary Fran Van Derven, an occupational therapist in the Polytrauma Support Clinic who is helping oversee the program. “This helps those

with traumatic brain injuries and musculoskeletal pains from a mind-body perspective, and incorporates physical and mental healing.”

The program involves a simple form of tai chi as a moderate-intensity exercise, and not the more complex moves.

“Traditional tai chi would not blend well with the polytrauma rehabilitation population; the regular form is too complex,” said Patricia Corrigan Culotti, master certified tai chi instructor. “The development of Tai Chi Fundamentals® has transformed this situation. It is a series of lessons and exercises with increasing difficulty that promotes postural integration, deep breathing, and ease of

movement leading to a person feeling more relaxed.”

The staff used the first part of the grant to get specific training in tai chi, as well as classes on how to teach it to others. Van Derven said therapists have started incorporating it into their daily therapies and interactions with Veterans. The next goal is to develop classes here and in the community over the next six months.

“We want to use this training to empower staff, to give them one more tool for treatment in their toolbox,” said Dr. Judith Kosasih, who leads the polytrauma team. “These are learned skills that will keep on giving. It is also patient proactive and fits in well with the Veteran’s life

health plan.”

The VA is partnering with several community groups such as Dry Hootch, Milwaukee Adaptive Sports and the University of Wisconsin to increase outreach. Van Derven said the team is also looking for service members and Veterans who wish to learn the skills as peer instructors.

“I think by doing that, it just improves and increases access for everyone,” she said.

For more information or to become a peer instructor for the program, call Van Derven at 414-384-2000, ext. 41140.