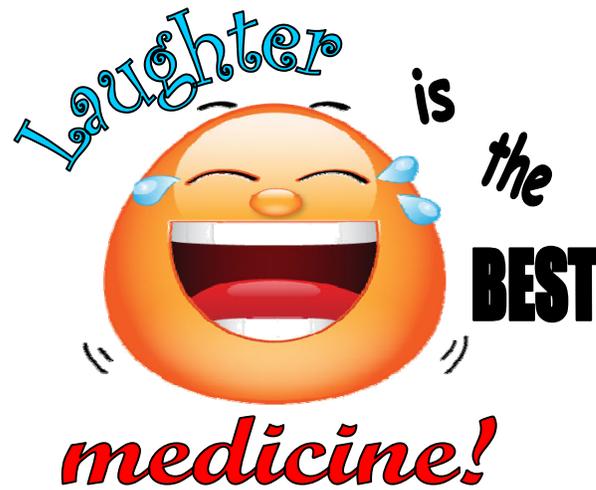


medicine!

“Dr. Feel Good”

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“Dr. Feel Good”

In 100 words or less, briefly describe your Best Practice.

It is more contagious than a cough or sneeze...it relaxes the whole body...it triggers the release of endorphins...and can promote an overall sense of well being. What is it? LAUGHTER! Our Best Practice is an overall wellness program for our residents with an emphasis on “Laughter Yoga,” which is a new twist on an ancient practice. Additionally, regular exercise and a variety of healthy snack choices provides a multitude of health benefits for residents. Our Best Practice, Dr. Feel Good, incorporates laughter yoga, tai chi, healthy snacks and light weight training to promote a healthier lifestyle.

What problem does your Best Practice address, and what is its primary purpose?

Sometimes living in a nursing home can become a little monotonous, with all of those habitual activities on the calendar day after day, month after month. Our Best Practice directly addresses the lackluster day-to-day activities that a resident typically encounters. With laughter yoga, there is never a dull moment! We started by listening to the voices of our residents. Many of them expressed a desire for healthier diet choices, and several even stated that they wanted more challenging activities. We went right to the drawing board. We decided that not only would “Dr. Feel Good” address their wants and needs, it would also provide many health benefits for a wide range of residents.

In particular, laughter yoga exercises are one of the best things seniors can do for their heart. Laughter has the ability to decrease the effects of cardiovascular disease, which can lead to heart attacks. Studies have also shown that laughter has many positive effects on the entire body. It can help control pain, relieve tension, lower blood pressure, and boost the immune system. In fact, one minute of laughter burns the same number of calories as 6 to 10 minutes on the treadmill. Additionally, studies validate the theory that there are psychological benefits connected with laughter. With laughter yoga, it has the power to change a person’s mood within minutes by releasing endorphins. We have come to find that when a resident’s mood is good, they feel good and remain cheerful throughout the day. Quite frequently people view a nursing home environment as a place for serious treatment. Residents, families and staff are all surrounded by difficult and complicated situations on a daily basis. By encouraging opportunities for laughter and joy, we feel we are creating an environment that is more pleasant and upbeat. The primary purpose of our Best Practice is to ensure that our residents’ quality of life are continually improved and enhanced.

What group(s) of residents and others are involved in your Best Practice and how does it work? (Who and how many are helped, what are the benefits to these people, and what methods or procedures/protocols are used to get results?)

Initially, one of our employees had a friend who had recently become a Certified Laughter Yoga Instructor. The instructor was interested in “practicing” her laughter coaching on our employees. This staff member immediately thought it would be a wonderful experience for our residents as well as employees. For our very first classes, we offered one session for residents then immediately following that we held a session for our staff. We felt it was crucial for our employees to understand the program to ensure their full support with what we were trying to accomplish for our residents.

Every resident in our facility is welcome to participate in any part or all of the wellness program. This program works similar to a regular activity. Our Activities Director posts the activity on the calendar twice a week. The residents can come to the class, and afterward enjoy some healthy snack options. Some of the snacks we have offered include: fresh fruit, yogurt, “Fit” popcorn, baby carrots, granola bars, fruit smoothies and flavored water, among many more options. This wellness program will help anyone who attends the classes or snack sessions by allowing them the opportunity for outside-the-box activity choices and at the same time engaging their bodies in excellent muscle stimulation. Laughter yoga specifically provides a wonderful way of engaging core muscle groups for those residents who are in wheelchairs or even confined to their bed.

During laughter yoga, the classes typically start with some socializing and talking about laughter. Then the group warms up with stretches and breathing exercises. After warming up, the laughter games start! Generally, the laughter yoga classes contain these four basic steps: clapping and chanting, laughter yoga breathing, uncomplicated playfulness, and laughter yoga exercises.

What has your Best Practice accomplished and how have you been able to tell this? (You are permitted to give numbers and/or use specific “before and after” examples.)

Every day that our classes take place, our residents who attend feel a sense of joy and a positive state of mind. There are numerous residents who look forward to participating each time the laughter yoga classes are held. One resident stated, “My favorite thing about the class is ALL of it and I love it!” Some residents have laughed so hard that they cried tears of joy. To us, even if we can make one single resident’s day a little better and brighter, then it is all worth it.

What problems, obstacles, or challenges might other facilities face in replicating part or all of your innovation? Were there any adverse effects or any ways that things turned out differently than you had planned? Do you know of any other facilities which have tried this or a similar best practice idea?

One of the most difficult challenges we faced during the implementation of our Best Practice was the reality that there were a few residents who did not enjoy laughter yoga. Even though we were extremely upbeat when promoting this innovative idea, not all residents took to it equally. This was one adverse effect that we did not foresee when we began the program. When we originally started the wellness training, we put it on the activity calendar three days per week. This was mainly due to our thoughts of a typical person’s workout program being the most beneficial if done more frequently. After the first month, we learned that it was better received by our residents if we offered the classes only two days per week.

We feel certain there are numerous other facilities that have had tai chi classes, and even offered healthy snacks just as we had done in the past. However, the main difference in our program is the addition of the laughter yoga combined with all of the other wellness activities.

What was the cost to implement your Best Practice (include dollars, staff, supplies, equipment, etc.)? How did you pay for it?

The cost to implement our program was minimal. The only actual cost involved was for the purchase of additional healthy snacks, which we used out of our activity food monthly budget. We also bought light weights and exercise equipment such as dumbbells, ankle weights, weight balls, stretch loops and wrist weights for the weight training classes of our program, and for this purchase we held a facility-wide fundraiser. Our activities staff conducts the classes during normal activity times. The certified laughter yoga instructor came to teach the first class for us at no cost, which worked out wonderfully for us and she also gained more teaching experience. It truly has been a win-win for everyone!

What are the reasons you consider this Best Practice to be excellent and innovative?

Our Best Practice took a common, everyday familiar activity and created an exceptionally innovative twist with the addition of laughter yoga and weight training, merged with the satisfying healthy snack bar! It has been such a pleasurable experience for all the residents that participate. Our day-in and day-out motivation is committed to ensuring that our residents are always living a happy, meaningful life. In the eyes of our residents, life satisfaction has nothing to do with money, success or possessions...it has much more to do with fostering healthy relationships and connecting with each other. Our Best Practice enables these residents to feel an emotional acceptance within the group, and since laughter is naturally contagious, it creates the positive environment and bonding behaviors that we all continually strive to give our residents day in and day out.

