

NEWSLETTER

April 2017

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T. A. A.
Tai Chi Association of Australia



President's Message

Tai Chi Chuan & Mental Health

Brian Corless, a TCAA member who is a Clinical Psychologist on the NSW South Coast, reports on his review of recent research literature on the psychological health benefits of Tai Chi Chuan practice (including QiGong).

Ample evidence was found in the studies reviewed that, apart from the physiological benefits such as skeletal flexibility & strength, lung capacity, and balance, there were positive mental health benefits such as improved quality of sleep, psychosocial wellbeing, and reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Read Brian's full article below.

2017 TCAA Open Championships

The registration form for the Championship is now available for download from the TCAA Website <http://www.taichiaustralia.com>.

Routines for bare hands are all 5-6 minutes, except for 24 Short Forms remaining at 4-5 minutes.

Routines for Jian (Chinese sword) are all 3-4 minutes. **Stop Press!** Routines for non-Jian apparatus (broadsword, fan, ball, staff) are now 1-4 minutes.



This year, we are reintroducing the **Bare Hands Group Event**. Team size must be between 4 to 10. Timings will be 4 to 6 minutes.

Push hands will again use the "semi-fixed" step format that the TCAA finds is safe, yet providing the opportunity to apply the true foundational skill of control without excessive jockeying. This year, we are expecting female participation.

However, we will have the privilege of a special demonstration over the lunch break (on the day) of Push Hands contest under the "**Moving-Step**" rules. This will be conducted by the members from the Kungfu Wushu WA, showing how the refereeing may be conducted safely & effectively. Noting that Push Hands competitions in China at the highest level is by the "Moving-Step" rules, it may be desirable in Australia to transition into those rules if Australia is to aspire towards international level main-stream Push Hands. We will have to decide with participant feedback whether the TCAA Competition will take up this challenge or ask that the KWA take it up.

Ken Goh

President 2016/7

Reminder: NCAS INSTRUCTOR ACCREDITATION AND MAIA INSURANCE

Some members have encountered hitches with obtaining their accreditation cards. Here are a few tips to avoid some pitfalls:

- Do not change your postal address and/or email address after you submit your final accreditation submission. Your cards and correspondence will end up in the wrong place and could be irretrievable.
- If you have existing insurance, it is unlikely to meet the MAIA accreditation stringent requirements. You are advised to simply say you do not have valid insurance and apply for the MAIA insurance.
- The video you submit of your class need not be a masterpiece; it should simply be taken by a camera situated in the corner of your training space that shows that the going-on's in your class complies with the rules of safe conduct. It is not intended to show the full range of your teaching capability.
- If you call the KWA phone number provided on your submission form to make enquiries, and is diverted to a message bank, **DO leave a clear message stating your name, the topic of enquiry, AND YOUR PHONE NUMBER.**

Events/What's On:

NCAS Instructor Accreditation.

See the KWA website for dates at http://kungfuwushuaustralia.com/accreditation_dates.php
BE SURE TO COMPLY WITH KWA rules on closing dates and registration method.

2017 TCAA Open Championships

This will be ON the 3rd JUNE 2017, Saturday. Registration form on website <http://www.taichiaustralia.com>
Note: NOT Queen's Birthday weekend.

Workshop: Yangzhao Taiji 85 Forms

By Grandmaster, Zhao YouBin, 5th Generation inheritor of Yang Taijiquan
Contact: <http://www.yangzhaotaiji.com>

Workshop: Dr Paul Lam

Register on line: www.taichiforhealthinstitute.org/workshops
TCAA member discount.

July 2017 Sydney: Tai Chi for Arthritis and Fall Prevention; Tai Chi for Energy or Tai Chi for Rehabilitation; Explore the Depth of Tai Chi for Arthritis. Contact -Dianne McGrath at service@tchi.org or phone 02 9533 6511

Aug 2017 Adelaide: Tai Chi for Energy
Tai Chi for Energy 2
Adelaide contact: Brenda bghum@internode.on.net; phone 0413022246

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Please see end of this Newsletter about submitting articles and about submitting events & what's on.

TAI CHI CHUAN AND MENTAL HEALTH: BECOMING WELL BALANCED

Brian Corless

Research on Tai Chi Chuan over a number of years has shown that its health benefits are many and varied. At a personal level, perhaps you've noticed, if you are like me, that as we grow older our regular Tai Chi Chuan practice has helped our bodies to be better prepared for the normal processes of aging as muscles, joints and other tissues lose their elasticity (Lara et al., 2016; Sherratt, 2009). Others have also demonstrated that regular Tai Chi practice helps us maintain a degree of skeletal flexibility and strength, even if the aches and pains persist, and these benefits flow-on for our vascular and cognitive functioning as well ((Antunes et al., 2016; Barnes, 2015). I also know that in penning this article, I am preaching to the Tai Chi converted and that our collective challenge is to help others discover these benefits.



As important as these physical benefits are, regular practice of Tai Chi Chuan is as much of benefit for the mind, as it is for the body. The flow of endorphins in the brain and that “feel good” experience after a Tai Chi workout, certainly tells me that my mood and mind is benefiting from this regular practice. These positive feelings led me to wonder what the recent research says about Tai Chi and mental health and to put together a summary of some recent research studies, if only to confirm what we Tai Chi practitioners already know, intuitively.

By way of introduction and to get a feel for the numbers involved in Tai Chi Chuan, I looked at a recent survey of the prevalence and patterns of Tai Chi practice in the U.S. (Lauche et al., 2016). From an analysis of the 2012 U.S. National Health Interview Survey of about 35,000 participants it was estimated that approximately 7 million people ($\approx 3\%$) in the U.S., out of a population of about 240 million, have practised Tai Chi Chuan in their lifetime, and about 3 million ($\approx 1\%$) have done so in the previous 12 months. The U.S. 12-month prevalence estimate for Tai Chi in 2012 showed only a slight increase ($\approx 100,000$ participants) from the estimate of 2002, compared to the larger increase in estimated 12-month prevalence for Yoga participation, a comparable mind-body exercise, which rose from 10 million participants in 2002 to 21 million in 2012. It was suggested that a more aggressive marketing approach to publicly promoting Yoga in the U.S. may explain its success. Also, a disparity in the statistics was found in that younger age ranges are generally more represented in Yoga research, compared with older age ranges in Tai Chi research.

Unfortunately, similar information is not readily available for Tai Chi Chuan prevalence data in Australia. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) includes data for “Tai Chi” as part of a broad, overall “Martial Arts” category, whereas Yoga is treated as a distinct recreational activity category which has Australian prevalence data easily available. Perhaps this presents an opportunity for the Australian Tai Chi community to ask the ABS to publish category data for Tai Chi in its “Participation in Sport and Physical Activity” reports so that we can better understand how many people engage in Tai Chi practice in Australia, how often they participate and their characteristics. In order to promote the health benefits of Tai Chi Chuan in the future it would be useful to know where we are now.

For Tai Chi and mental health, a number of research articles have summarised its benefits as a means of promoting mental health and well being (Wang, Zhang et al., 2009; Wang, Bannuru et al., 2010; Field, 2011; Jimenez et al., 2012; Abbott & Lavretsky, 2013). In summary, these findings confirmed that the combination of regularly practiced relaxed, diaphragmatic breathing and gentle mindful movement creates a physiological and psychological environment that supports better mental health (Payne & Crane-Godreau, 2013). The Payne and Crane-Godreau (2013) paper provides a good summary of the effects of “meditative movement”, including Tai Chi Chuan, on affective states along with pitfalls and problems in conducting this research.

More recent review articles have attempted to further summarize the benefits of Tai Chi Chuan on mental health with mixed results. Wang, Lee et al., (2014) conducted a systematic review of 37 randomized controlled trials (RCTs) (from English and Chinese research databases) and offered qualified support for the practice of Tai Chi Chuan in reducing symptoms of depression, anxiety and general stress, and improving participant’s quality of life, overall. A meta-analysis was conducted examining the effects of Tai Chi Chuan versus a range of control groups, on symptoms of depression and it showed significantly reduced scores for depression in the Tai Chi group with an effect size = -6 , (range 0 to -10). The authors recommended that Tai Chi Chuan become an integrated adjunctive component of existing treatments for depression, however noted limitations in the methods of the reviewed studies, leading them to call for more rigorous research designs for Tai Chi and mental health (Wang, Lee, et al., 2014).

Yin and Dishman (2014) examined the effects of Tai Chi Chuan and Qigong, as “mindful exercises”, on symptoms of depression and anxiety in a systematic review of English-only research studies and concluded that Tai Chi and Qigong have small to moderate effect sizes for reducing depression and anxiety, and that these effects are similar to other research supporting Western styles of physical exercise e.g. walking, cycling (Freeman et al., 2010). Specifically, for over 2,700 participants across 35 research studies, Tai Chi Chuan reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety overall, and interestingly those people with higher levels of depression at baseline, benefited the most from its anti-depressant effect. As with other reviews, the authors noted limitations in the design of a number of studies and these results need to be viewed cautiously, but are certainly encouraging.

Another selective systematic review of 10 research studies (Liu et al., 2015) examined the effects of Qigong and Tai Chi Chuan on symptoms of depression alone, and surprisingly found that Qigong reduced symptoms of depression, but not Tai Chi, which was contrary to other earlier systematic reviews (Wang, Bannuru et al., 2010; Chi et al., 2013). Liu et al (2015), suggested that the more “mindful” aspects of Qigong, by paying more attention to one’s inner experiences compared to Tai Chi Chuan may explain the difference in results. Again, limitations in the methodology and the poor quality of some of the studies reviewed could have confounded these findings.

Symptoms of insomnia often co-occur with symptoms of depression, and insomnia is seen as a significant risk factor for the onset of depression in younger and older age groups (Clark et al, 2015; Cockayne et al., 2015). In a systematic review of Chinese and English language RCTs, Wang et al (2016) examined the effects of “meditative movement” (MM; comprising Tai Chi Chuan, Qigong and Yoga) on insomnia and found that in 17 high-quality research studies (eight of which used Tai Chi Chuan as an intervention), MM had a positive effect on sleep quality in a variety of patient groups and may be a useful treatment for insomnia that is comorbid with other conditions, such as depression.

Also last year, Webster et al. (2016) in a review of Chinese and English research studies examined the effects of Tai Chi Chuan on the psychological health of over 9,000 college students. This systematic review found that the benefits of Tai Chi included increased physical flexibility, lung capacity, quality of sleep, and reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety and improved psychosocial well-being in these college students (Webster et al., 2016). In contrast to the earlier paper of Liu et al (2015), which found evidence in support of Qigong but not Tai Chi for reducing symptoms of depression, the Webster et al (2016) paper concluded that the improved psychological and psychosocial functioning of college students was a result of “the deliberate mindfulness training of Tai Chi Chuan”. These results also indicated that although the stereotype of a Tai Chi Chuan practitioner is of someone of an older age group, its physical and psychological benefits can be found across all age ranges.

Finally, Solloway et al (2016) used an “evidence map” research technique to provide a broad overview of the effects of Tai Chi Chuan on a range of physiological and psychological health outcomes which had been published separately as RCTs in the past 5 years. RCTs are seen as the gold-standard research design when examining the effects of health interventions on health outcomes. Solloway et al (2016) highlighted the rapid increase in the publication of research on Tai Chi Chuan and health in the past 5 years and effectively conducted a broad review of 107 systematic reviews of RCTs involving Tai Chi Chuan as a health intervention. The authors concluded that the regular practice of Tai Chi Chuan has benefits for general health (51 RCTs), psychological well-being (37 RCTs), interventions for older adults (31 RCTs), balance (27 RCTs), hypertension (18 RCTs), falls prevention (15 RCTs), and cognitive performance (11 RCTs). Specifically, for Tai Chi Chuan and mental health, an evidence map of 13 previous systematic reviews examining Tai Chi Chuan and symptoms of depression found that Tai Chi Chuan had a beneficial anti-depressant effect across these studies.

Overall, these results are encouraging for the effects of regular Tai Chi Chuan practice on symptoms of depression and improving mental health generally, however limitations of small sample sizes, unclear research designs and an absence of longer-term follow-up studies were highlighted as deficiencies in the research (Solloway et al., 2016). These conclusions will hopefully lead researchers to address these limiting factors in future as the popularity and interest in Tai Chi Chuan increases.

In these busy lives that we lead nowadays, taking the time to relax and mindfully contemplate is certainly a gift that we can willingly give ourselves and others. If we include the gentle movements of a Tai Chi Chuan form with intention, into this mindful practice, then we are closer to balancing the “three adjustments” in Traditional Chinese Medicine of body, breath and mind (Liu, 2010). Whether your Tai Chi Chuan is martial or practised for health, the benefits are there to be experienced for mind and body, and the current research supports this. But then again, didn’t we know that already?

Editor’s Note: Brian Corless is a Clinical Psychologist on the NSW south coast and practises Tai Yi Tai Chi Chuan under the tutelage of Sifu Wang Yun Kuo, Kungfu Republic Academy, Sydney. (Copyright Feb 2017 of the composition of this article remains with Brian.)

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SWORD EXEMPTION RULES, VICTORIA

(Reminder)

Members are reminded that the only sure way to have the exemption is to submit the Exemption Application Form and the prescribed Statutory Declaration Form from the TCAA website <http://www.taichiaustralia.com/swords.html>. Without an exemption based on the Statutory Declaration, the exemption is incomplete, and TCAA will not be able to assist you if the Victorian Police questions your claim to exemption based only on your membership of the TCAA.

HOLY GRAIL OF TAI CHI

Ken Goh

A few years ago, I started the search for the one fundamental principle, the Holy Grail, in Tai Chi, and if there was a way to work towards it. I now believe that part of the answer is “song” (pronounced “soong”), which literally means “loose”, but not implying “falling apart” and or “slack”. The “looseness” is **internal** – within the body, felt in the muscles and in the bones. There should be a feeling of elongation of the muscle fibres, tendons, and bones. We all know that muscles can only contract; the opposing muscle, if not chronically locked, will elongate naturally. But BOTH muscles elongate at the same time?? How? *This is the million dollar question.* This ability is currently (not permanently) my Holy Grail.

I mentioned in a previous article that some teach that you may train by extending your fingers. I would add to that one should feel the head reaching up (not pushed up) towards a point above the head. I have found the concept of “being hung by a string attached to the head” a little difficult not to tighten my neck, so I don’t try that. I also try “allowing” my tailbone to reach for a point underground below my feet. It’s a bit like trying to reach for the heavens and the centre of the Earth at the same time.

Don’t take my word for it, experiment for yourself and feeeeeeel your body doing things.

WEBSITE TIPS

If you find that you are not seeing on a website what you expect to see, it may be that your browser (eg Internet Explorer) needs to be told to “REFRESH”. What sometimes happens is that your browser keeps a webpage that you browse in a “cache” on your own computer. Every time you go to that website, it only goes to the “cache” stored before and does not go the current website as it is NOW. Therefore you will not see any changes that have been made since your “cache” was made.

So, PLEASE, when you go any website you may have gone to before, always REFRESH by clicking on the little circle with an arrow head (see the red arrow pointing to it below). It is usually at the top of your webpage on the same line as your URL line.

Ken



EDITOR'S NOTES: SUBMITTING ARTICLES

Besides informing the membership about matters from the Management Committee, this Newsletter is also a members' forum for learning/teaching ideas.

Members are invited to send in articles. Articles should be first-hand observations and conclusions/opinions. Should you need to quote published material or the opinion of others, you should identify the source (a hyperlink if available), and provide your summary of the subject matter as relevant to your article.

Providing your article implies permission given to the TCAA to publish. Others may use the information in the articles without necessarily acknowledging you as the originator. As you may know, copyright is not related to an idea but to the "*specific expression (embodiment)*" of ideas or concepts, meaning your composition that is an original weaving together an implementation of ideas and sequences. (TCAA disclaims providing legal advice.)

The Editor reserves the right to make changes to comply with our Code of Conduct and space considerations. Please submit your article(s) to tcaanews@gmail.com.

EDITOR'S NOTES: SUBMITTING EVENTS AND WHAT'S ON

Members may send a short title/description of less than 70 characters about events. Include a hyperlink to your website for the reader to get further information. This facility is provided FREE, but limited to one event per member, or until the EVENTS column on the first page is filled up. Editor reserves the right to reduce content if necessary.

The Editor may also provide hyperlinks to events of interest brought to the Editor's attention, if deemed consistent with the promotion of Tai Chi.

This facility is not meant for your regular class advertising, which should be on the website under "Find Instructors". Please submit your events to tcaanews@gmail.com.