

Evaluation 2005

This evaluation produced some very encouraging results. 79% really enjoy the classes, and 81% reported benefits of exercising. More than a quarter practice at home every other day or more. About three quarters also find the social aspect of the class important. Five people also reported definite improvement in pain levels experienced outside of class.

In China Tai Chi is referred to as ‘Treasure’ not just for its health benefits but the personal joy it tends to create. From the response to the questionnaire it seems that many people here are beginning understand this idea and see Tai Chi in the same way.

Overview

The evaluation took the form of a two page questionnaire comprising 16 questions in three sections and a comments box. Each question had a choice of five progressive value tick boxes. All five ‘Tai Chi for Health Senior’ classes were offered participation. These are generally free standing community classes apart from one which is supported by the NHS. The purpose of the evaluation was three fold;

- 1. Good Practice**
- 2. Feedback to evaluate past and plan future classes**
- 3. To get students to think about the effects of Tai Chi.**

The students range in age from late 50’s to about 90. It was anonymous and no personal data was included. 42 forms were completed. Some single forms represent the views of couples. There were about 80 students on roll at the time and this evaluation represents about 50% of them. All agreed to allow the information and comments to be added to the evaluation as a whole

Curriculum to date included general Tai Chi exercise, Golden Ball Tai Chi, Zhan Zhuang and a small part of the Lam Form. All of the exercises were taught to me by Master Lam Kam-Chuen. Some students are in the process of learning the Lam Small Circle Form. Classes run for one hour, most have up to half an hour seated exercise.

All comments are included “*as written*” and are placed at appropriate places throughout this evaluation.

Students ranged from regular attendees for about a year to partial attendees for a few months. As these quotes show this does mean that some people felt that not enough time had been spent to give a valuable reflection of Tai Chi.

“Neither of us have been to a sufficient number of classes yet to give worthwhile assessment to benefits”

“I have only been in the class around 2 months and have not made all the meetings. It is difficult therefore to express solid values.”

“I have not been attending long enough to notice any major changes but I have every confidence that I will in due course thank you”

“As a comparative newcomer to the class I feel it’s a little too early to expect results but I am sure it will help me in time, especially if I make the effort to practice at home”

Class Organization

1 Is the venue appropriate?

Totally inappropriate	Slightly inappropriate	Adequate	Appropriate	Very appropriate
1	0	11	16	14
2%	0%	26%	38%	33%

One hall has been cold in the past. Otherwise the locality and venues themselves seem to fit the client group.

2 Is the teacher approachable?

Totally unapproachable	Slightly unapproachable	Adequate	Approachable	Very approachable
0	0	0	4	38
0%	0%	0%	10%	90%

“Tony is always keen to answer any problems we may have. Also if one finds any exercise difficult for whatever reason, not to strain to do it. Thank you Tony for an enjoyable class.”

3 Is the class the right length?

Much too short	Too short	About right	Too long	Much too long
0	2	40	0	0
0%	5%	95%	0%	0%

4 Are the exercises appropriate for your ability?

Much too hard	Too hard	About right	Too easy	Much too easy
0	0	33	5	1
0%	0%	85%	13%	2%

“Too easy- but I am aware that I am not the classes target audience”

5 Is there adequate individual attention?

There is much too little	There is too little	About right	There is too much	There is much too much
0	2	40	0	0
0%	5%	95%	0%	0%

“how could there possibly be too much”

“Tony is very sensitive to the NHS knowledge of the class and is thorough but not condescending in his explanations and is very helpful and varied in his classes”

One group is primarily made up of retired NHS workers.

These statistics speak clearly for themselves. The classes are generally aimed at pushing individuals within their capabilities allowing for ability, which is quite diverse. There is an emphasis on safe exercising and emotional sensitivity within the class.

“The sessions are conducted in a very sensitive manner and the activity is on goingly attuned to the endurance level of the class. In cases where students may experience passing discomfort, they are encouraged to sit out for a period and rejoin as they feel restored. This undoubtedly builds confidence and resolve in the person”.

“I find Tony makes everybody feel at ease. He makes sure that we all do things within our own capabilities. If we have any problems he is very good at sorting them out. Well done Tony”

“Would enjoy more of the same at Long Ashton”

“Would like more classes to be held at Long Ashton”

There may be a second class in Long Ashton soon.

“A very good instructor”

How has Tai Chi affected you?

6 Has exercising affected your flexibility?

It has made it much worse	It has made it worse	No change	Slight improvement	Definite improvement
0	0	14	18	10
0%	0%	33%	43%	24%

67% noticed some improvement

7 Has exercising affected your stamina?

It has made it much worse	It has made it worse	No change	Slight improvement	Definite improvement
0	0	15	20	7
0%	0%	35%	47%	17%

64% noticed some improvement

8 Has exercising affected your balance?

It has made it much worse	It has made it worse	No change	Slight improvement	Definite improvement
0	0	20	15	7
0%	0%	47%	35%	17%

52% noticed some improvement

9 Has exercising affected your confidence?

It has made it much worse	It has made it worse	No change	Slight improvement	Definite improvement
0	0	23	11	8
0%	0%	55%	26%	19%

45% noticed some improvement

10 Has exercising affected your general health?

It has made it much worse	It has made it worse	No change	Slight improvement	Definite improvement
0	0	20	14	8
0%	0%	48%	33%	19%

52% noticed some improvement

11 Has exercising affected your feelings/emotional state?

It has made it much worse	It has made it worse	No change	Slight improvement	Definite improvement
0	0	19	14	9
0%	0%	45%	33%	22%

55% noticed some improvement

12 Has exercising affected any usual pain levels outside of class?

It has made it much worse	It has made it worse	No change	Slight improvement	Definite improvement
0	1	18	13	5
0%	3%	49%	33%	13%

46% noticed some improvement

Not everyone answered this question and I did not ask if people experienced pain normally. Unfortunately therefore the statistics here are not very conclusive other than the fact that nearly half did notice some improvement. These changes are likely noticed by those who have experienced pain, no change being ticked by some who do not experience any in day to day life. The one negative response also gave a quote “sometimes”.

“There is no change in my physical condition as I do not suffer any pain or discomfort. But find the exercises very relaxing and mentally stimulating and enjoy exercising with a group- and the discipline it entails.”

Overview of benefits.

34 replies reported at least one improved category. People who attend have a variety of ability, some were very unstable whilst others are fit and active. Tai Chi tends to affect people individually. The vast majority, 81%, reported some benefit. Also note the quotes above about time in class. These results seem very encouraging and speak for themselves.

There were a few forms where ticks ran down the slight change or definite change category and several that did the same for the no change category. The majority of forms were very specific in their answers as there was a spectrum of ticks.

There was only one negative response in one category. Obviously as the people who attend are voluntary there was an expectation of a positive response. Flexibility and stamina showed the biggest reported change. It is easy for students to notice this as they can compare their ability to earlier classes. More than 46% reported benefit in each category. There was no baseline taken at the start of class to compare.

“Felt really energized after first class”

“I am interested in relating tai chi to specific health conditions and to maintaining sports fitness minimizing/preventing injuries.”

“It appears as if it might maintain health gradually both mentally and physically- this lessens the burden on the NHS”

“I really enjoy the calming effect I come away with after every class, and the feel good factor”

“I appreciate the explanations why certain exercises or movements produce physiological changes and benefits. Awareness of balance is a main benefit, also using some muscles that are rarely used in day to day movements”

“I was sceptical at first but completely won over now”

“I used to get restless legs in bed, have realized that I don't seem to get since doing tai chi”

“The relaxation exercise has been a very effective stress buster. Have been known to give impromptu demos if asked and recently found myself explaining the benefits to an 84 year old friend”

Other Questions

13 Do you generally enjoy the classes?

Not at all	Not very much	There are ok	I enjoy them	I really enjoy them
0	0	3	6	33
0%	0%	7%	14%	79%

This is hugely important. The classes must be enjoyable to maintain people's interest and attendance.

“Feel really enthusiastic about the classes, way beyond my expectations.”

“Do you have private consultations?”

14 How important is the social aspect of the class?

Not at all	Not very much	It is slightly important	It is important	It is very important
0	3	8	22	9
0%	7%	19%	52%	22%

The question was worded deliberately. For a few the social aspect is not important. However 93% find the social aspect important to some degree, 74% state that is important. This is an integral part of the classes. People come together to play, work and take on challenges together. Students are valued by the teacher and other students. There is also some time given to explore topics around health and emotional issues generally. I am very happy that the group have experienced this aspect positively.

The social aspect is an important goal of the classes. For some people ageing includes a shrinking of the social group. The classes are friendly and although can be hard work are relaxed and light. The social interaction is a bi-product of the group activity. I am sure that this is also contributory to reported changes in the emotional state of participants.

The class ends with a salute and bow to all participants. This is a cultural aspect of the system. Its purpose is not only to show honour to the lineage of Tai Chi but also to demonstrate that all students are part of that process. In effect we are all family at that time.

“I look forward to the class each week because even if I don't manage to exercise any other time I do it then. Even if I have a frantic week I can relax un that hour and try to get things in perspective. I like the sociability of my fellow students and the patients

and calmness of our teacher. If I persevere I am sure there will be lots of improvement mentally and physically”

15 Would you recommend the class to a friend?

Definitely not	Probably not	If asked	Definitely	I have told all my friends
0	0	3	21	18
0%	0%	7%	50%	43%

“shame most don’t live close and I cant persuade those who do to come along sorry.”

16 Do you practice at home?

Never	Sporadically	Once/twice a week	3-4 times a week	Every day
2	19	11	8	2
5%	45%	26%	19%	5%

This is very encouraging.

50% practice regularly at home, nearly 25% more than three times a week.

The syllabus is quite broad and run in a turn up and practice fashion. This is to give everyone the ability to have an interesting weekly workout. Normally Tai Chi is taught very slowly with an expectation on the student to study at home. Also repetitions of exercises may last up to half an hour. It is unlikely that the client group would be physically able to train this way or enjoy it as they clearly do. The class also needs to be continually open to new beginners. A topic is taught for a few months then changes. This is not only for the health benefits or to keep interest but to allow newcomers to feel able to join without feeling too far behind and to allow for people who have some difficulty remembering.

“Any exercise to improve memory would be very welcome”

Conclusions

Generally the statistics speak for themselves. The response is very positive. I get continual feedback from the group verbally and this evaluation confirms previously reported reactions.

A last quote-

“I wish the class had started years before”

There is no individual data about conditions, falls, age, sex or other demographic detail.