

DANCE RESEARCH WITH ENGLISH NATIONAL BALLET WINS PRESTIGIOUS AWARD

11th November 2011

Top medical charity, the Bupa Foundation, yesterday awarded Dr. Sara Houston, University of Roehampton, its Vitality for Life Prize for her research on English National Ballet's *Dance for Parkinson's* programme. Dr. Houston's work examined the benefits to quality of life for people with Parkinson's taking part in dance classes run by English National Ballet. The award-winning research demonstrated how dancing can positively affect well-being, physical movement and social integration for those living with the debilitating condition.

Importantly, the research demonstrated the added value that dance as an art form can bring in addressing the 'boredom' factor of repetitive exercise, in aiding those whose mobility is compromised and whose confidence is low and in encouraging participation and social interaction for those who do not like to exercise regularly or who do not wish to go to Parkinson's support groups.

Each year the Bupa Foundation gives out a number of awards to recognise excellence in medical research and health care. The Vitality for Life Prize was given to Dr. Houston for outstanding research that enabled the promotion and encouragement of healthy ageing through physical activity and other social solutions for the older age group.

Dr. Sara Houston adds: *"It is tremendously exciting to win such a prestigious award. It signals the importance of dance research, of the seriousness behind having fun. For people with Parkinson's, dancing offers a physical, creative and social outlet that addresses healthy living in a holistic way. The Prize is a real boost to dance's acceptance as a credible alternative to straightforward exercising."*

Dr. Houston and her co-investigator, Ashley McGill, from the Dance Department at University of Roehampton, examined English National Ballet's *Dance for Parkinson's* classes over 12 weeks using ethnographic and scientific research methods. Using in-depth interviews, participant diaries, film footage, balance and stability measurements, they showed how dancing to music was leading to increased physical and social confidence, how people were moving significantly with more ease and stability, how feelings of well-being were being developed and social networks created. It attracted both men and women and those in the early and later stages of the disease.

Houston and McGill are now embarking on a second phase of research in partnership with English National Ballet to look at the experience of dancing with Parkinson's long term over three years.

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Notes for Editors

About Parkinson's

Parkinson's is a progressive, debilitating neurodegenerative disease which limits the ability to control normal movement and curtails everyday tasks and actions. Symptoms vary significantly, but commonly include tremors, muscle stiffness, slowness of movement, shuffling walk, lack of co-ordination and freezing of movement. Loss of balance and falls are frequent, and depression and social isolation are common. 1 in 500 UK adults are diagnosed with Parkinson's.

Contacts for interviews, features and photos

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