

Rhythmic Movement Aquatics (RMA): A Collaborative Approach to Developmental Movement Integration

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Our program is a unique collaboration among the CAM (Complementary and Alternative Medicine) Clinic, Aquatic Therapy and Music Therapy Departments at the Massachusetts Hospital School (MHS) in Canton, MA. The Rhythmic Movement and Aquatics Program (RMA) was recently developed at MHS to meet the needs of patients with limited functional mobility and cognitive issues. Through an interdisciplinary approach, the RMA Program encompasses two modalities: a dry-land component and an aquatic-based therapy supported by live acoustic music.

The land component is based on Rhythmic Movement Training (RMT)TM as developed by Dr. Harald Blomberg from Sweden. RMT incorporates rhythmical whole body movements done on the floor or mat, and relates to developmental movements seen in infants. These primitive movements facilitate natural growth, which leads to development of the brain and senses.

Those with disabilities often do not have an opportunity for movement due to various factors. As a result, brain systems lack integration and development is limited. Facilitating rhythmic movements has direct implications for positively impacting the brain, learning, and integrating the primitive reflexes.

Movements begin as passive (done by staff) and directly impact several senses, including vestibular (balance), tactile and proprioceptive sense organs. The focus is on creating exact movements that are symmetrical, rhythmical, smooth, coordinated and effortless. Results include increased attention, increased awareness, and self-regulation of emotions and behaviors.

The aquatic component is based on a variety of Aquatic Therapy techniques including Watsu®, Bad Ragaz and elements of PNF (Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation). The therapist uses the physical properties of water to facilitate the methods of muscle re-education utilizing specific pattern of resistance, endurance, elongation, relaxation, range of motion, and tonal reduction.

Combining aquatic therapy techniques and rhythmic movements increases the effectiveness of both modalities. The sensory experience of integrated movements that have a rhythmical quality both on land and water creates a rich learning environment. The two modalities use natural, fluid, spinal and whole-body movements that help release old patterns and reduce imbalances in the mind-body system. This land workshop and video presentation of this unique program will give the therapist an introduction to Rhythmic Movement, as well as provide information on how to seek further training in RMTTM as a valuable tool to enhance any aquatic therapy program.