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LSBU Media Contact:
Richard Turner
(020) 78156159
turnerr8@lsbu.ac.uk

TLT4CF Media Contact:
Joseph Lawlor
(+353) 87 1661703
info@tracielawlortrust.com

Groundbreaking research could improve lives of people with Cystic Fibrosis

Groundbreaking new research into the potential health benefits of a martial art could help improve the lives of youngsters who have one of the most common hereditary life-threatening diseases in Britain and Ireland.

The study will explore how tai chi can help people with cystic fibrosis (PWCF) to manage their condition and enjoy a better quality of life. Professor Nicola Robinson, an academic from London South Bank University will be working with young people with CF to explore whether this ancient Chinese martial art can relieve symptoms – including poor lung ventilation and recurrent infections – and improve their wellbeing.

Tai chi is believed to have a variety of health benefits as it relies on slow, controlled meditative movements developing strength, balance, posture, and calm – but its potential advantages for PWCF have not been closely examined before.

Professor Nicola Robinson, Professor of Traditional Chinese Medicine and Integrated Health at LSBU, will be working with CF patients aged between 16 and 21 who are being treated at the Royal Brompton Hospital, in London, and their families. This exploratory study will include examining the patients' health and wellbeing before, during and after using a variety of tai chi techniques to assess whether it has the potential to improve their quality of life.

And, if tai chi techniques are proved successful in helping PWCF, the research could have wider implications for national health policy, as not only would it support the Government's focus on the need for effective management techniques to improve health outcomes, but could impact on the need for NHS services.

Prof Robinson said: “This is a feasibility study in which we will begin to explore the evidence on the effectiveness of tai chi for young people with CF. It could help to relieve some of their symptoms and improve their wellbeing.

“Teaching tai chi to young people and parents will provide a self-management tool for habitual home practice throughout life, as a self management approach, could provide a useful life skill for many and have a range of health benefits.”

“After these preliminary studies are complete we hope to be able to carry out a trial to demonstrate the effectiveness of this self-management approach.”

Cystic fibrosis is one of the most common life-threatening inherited diseases in Britain and Ireland affects over 9,000 people in Britain. In Ireland 1 in 19 people are carriers of the CF gene. If Tai chi proves an effective way for PWCF to manage the condition, it will also benefit their families and carers who sometimes experience high levels of stress, anxiety and depression looking after those with the illness.

The Tracie Lawlor Trust for Cystic Fibrosis charity is funding the cost of the year-long pilot study.

Joseph Lawlor, founder of the charity and a PWCF himself, said: “This is a remarkable collaboration culminating in a unique study that could fundamentally change how persons with CF may be empowered to manage the many daily mental and physical aspects of their CF”.

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About the Tracie Lawlor Trust for Cystic Fibrosis (TLT4CF)

The Tracie Lawlor Trust was set up in 08’ after the tragic death of Tracie Lawlor (24) from Cystic Fibrosis. The trust’s aim is to promote awareness of CF, educate and empower people with CF by providing valuable impartial information about complementary and integrative methods toward improving their quality of life. The Trust also funds ongoing research into integrative medicine and collates this for the medical and lay community thus improving the therapeutic relationship in a clinical setting. None of our members receive a salary. The TLT4CF is a donor supported non-profit organisation. For more information go to www.tracielawlortrust.com

