PHYSICAL EXERCISE AND DANCING

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It is a general fact that the value of exercise as a remedial measure cannot be overestimated, the lack of proper exercise often being at the root of depleted conditions of health. Mr. Selekm an in "The Nation's Health" says:

Exercise builds muscle and stimulates the activity of the digestive, respiratory and other important organs but it is perhaps, not such common knowledge that a normal amount of play aids the body in throwing off poisonous toxins which accumulate as the result of overwork, fatigue and worry. Because recreation affords immediate relaxation, pleasure and happiness, physicians have long recognized its therapeutic value in the treatment of persons suffering from nervousness, overwork, mental breakdown or general physical or mental disability.

Of primary importance is correct posture. Nervous or mentally ill people have a tendency to become depressed and as a consequence they develop the habit of hanging their head, becoming stooped and round shouldered, acquiring a sagging abdomen with the final result of poor digestion, constipation, painful menstruation, ptosis and sometimes hernia. Every organ that sags out of place crowds and displaces another. Insist on the correct posture throughout the class hour and the simplest way is to say "chest up." The head will be up and the shoulders will fall back into their intended natural position. Then gradually increase the strength of the trunk and leg exercise.

Among mental cases there is a great deal of tension. Overcome this state by utter relaxation; rotating the head and then

1 Read at sixth annual meeting of the American Occupational Therapy Association, held at Atlantic City, September 25 to 29, 1922.
the trunk by slow rhythmical counts or to appropriate music. After executing a "day's order" play for ten or fifteen minutes some games as "Last Couple Out," Three Deep" or a relay race and wind up by a deep breathing exercise.

In giving the exercises care must be taken that they are varied so as to avoid the possibility of deadening monotony. On the other hand a great mistake is made by attempting to give movements which are too complex or complicated as it puts the patient into an irritable and unreceptive state of mind. It must be remembered that generally a patient is below par. It is much better to give simple exercise and derive the full benefit of the exercise by executing it correctly and thoroughly.

Splendid results have been obtained through the use of Health Records on the victrola. The music stimulates and arouses the interest of the more retarded and the older patients. By placing one of the brighter girls in front to act as a model, full attention may be placed on watching and correcting the movements of the others. Not only have the records caught the attention of the patients but also the nurses and their aid in urging and helping the patients has been invaluable.

Following the exercises some time should be devoted to dancing, either folk or social. To inculcate rhythm, give relaxation, and eradicate self consciousness, first teach the clog. Many of the patients that feel too old to dance will take part in the clog. And if folk or classical dancing is taught daily, clog at least twice a week. Character and eccentric dances with pantomime as the "Dutch Dance" are of great value as they give a wonderful opportunity for self expression. Have an end in view as performing at an entertainment or party, letting the patients design and make their own costumes.

For the younger and more advanced pupil in dancing, special classes in classical dancing are of infinite value as they doubly give the same results as above.

Social dancing should also be taught to every one. It helps to keep up the social spirit as nothing else does and every one should take part in it. Oftentimes patients that feel too old to take part in games and sports will dance thereby getting some
relaxation and pleasant physical activity. Dances with good music and an opportunity to “dress up” should be held once a month. It is good to begin a dance with a march or a Paul Jones breaking up the ice immediately that is so easy to form. “Great care should be taken to safeguard dancing through careful chaperonage and good music. No factor is more potent in determining the standard of dancing than the music, for clean dancing and group poise are almost wholly dependent on this feature.”