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Tai Chi and Qigong Recommended for Seniors

WASHINGTON, DC – April 5, 2006 – Experts in ancient Chinese wellness exercises -- Tai Chi and Qigong - say that if more seniors engaged in these body/mind exercises, older Americans would live longer and healthier lives.

A large, enthusiastic group of seniors from Southern California gave live action testimony to these ideas, demonstrating the wellness exercises for a group of journalists attending the National Council on Aging/American Society on Aging joint conference in Anaheim, CA on March 18.

“Qigong is one simple way to remain physically active and also relieve the stress of everyday life,” said James P. Firman, president and CEO of the National Council on Aging (NCOA) who regularly practices Qigong and Tai Chi. “Research has shown that it has positive effects, particularly for older adults. In China, some 20 to 30 percent of seniors participate in Tai Chi/Qigong. We hope that over time, we will have that kind of participation in the U.S.”

In 2005, the Archstone Foundation provided funding to NCOA, the National Blueprint Office at the University of Illinois and the Institute of Integral Qigong and Tai Chi to craft a framework for evidence-based Qigong and Tai Chi programs that local aging organizations can implement.

The press event at the NCOA/ASA annual conference marked the release of the “Consensus Document” of the National Expert Meeting on Qigong and Tai Chi which details this framework and will be disseminated widely. The report concluded that “there is growing evidence that Qigong and Tai Chi practices may be among the best forms of physical activity for diverse populations because they are low impact, low cost and easy to learn.”

Traditional Qigong and Tai Chi share three components – body focus, breath focus and mind focus. Qi Gong is a more quiet, meditative approach that is done standing or sitting. Tai Chi can be more active, though gentle, a set of choreographed, slow, flowing movements. Qigong often includes simple self-massage and Tai Chi often includes push-hands a two-person variation for balance, strength and reaction training.

Many hospitals, community centers, retirement settings, YMCAs and social service agencies have begun to provide access to Qigong and Tai Chi. Medical doctors and acupuncturists, recommend that their patients complement medical treatment with the practice of wellness exercises.

Because these body/mind practices are usually provided for groups, the per person cost is very low. In addition, research has demonstrated that social interactivity lowers the risk for many diseases. Qigong and Tai Chi practice sessions provide a perfect atmosphere of upbeat social interaction.

“Qi Gong and Tai Chi are examples of multi-dimensional forms of wellness that provide unique benefits, especially to older adults,” said Wojtek Chodzko-Zajko, head of the Department of Kinesiology at the University of Illinois. “We need to let people know that they are important forms of physical activity and relaxation, however, many people are still confused about these methods and think they have a foreign or religious connotation. However, excellent preliminary research has made it clear that the health benefits are accessible to all who practice.”

Roger Jahnke, OMD, founder and director of the Institute of Integral Qigong and Tai Chi and developer of Tai Chi Easy™, noted, “One of the most startling cultural oversights in this country is the myth that medicine only comes from somewhere outside of ourselves. The Chinese say the human body produces medicine for free and that Tai Chi/Qi Gong produce the elixir of longevity within.”

He added, “These ancient wellness practices are simple to learn and fun to practice. Those who practice regularly report a wide array of benefits from reductions in pain, stress and medication use. You can use them anywhere, anytime. You don’t even have to leave your chair to make use of this remarkable inner medicine for free.”

The hope is that Qigong and Tai Chi can be inexpensively diffused throughout the U.S. through greater public awareness and by referencing the guidelines in the Consensus Document. Other studies have demonstrated their effectiveness in preventing falls, chronic disease, and reducing negative drug interactions as well as improving overall wellbeing.

To get a copy of the Consensus Report from the National Expert Meeting on Qi Gong and Tai Chi go to <http://www.agingblueprint.org/PDFs/ConsensusDoc.pdf>.

To find out more about Qigong and Tai Ch, visit <http://www.NQA.org> or <http://www.Healthy.net/Qigong>.

Founded in 1950, the National Council on Aging (NCOA) is dedicated to improving the health and independence of older persons and increasing their continuing contributions to communities, society, and future generations. NCOA is a 501(c)3 organization located in Washington, DC. More information about NCOA can be found at <http://www.NCOA.org>.

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