

AQUATIC THERAPIES AND PRACTICES FOR ENHANCING THE SPA CENTERS SERVICES**Djobova, Stefka***Head assistant, PhD, Water Sports Chair, Sector APA and Sport, National Sports Academy,***Key words:** *national standard, wellness, water based,***INTRODUCTION**

Water is fantastic element but too often we take it for granted, especially when it falls from the sky. Without it there would be no life on this planet and anywhere there is water on the planet there is life. Our bodies are made up of more than 50 percent water and so we have a really strong affinity to be beside water. Gravity and body weight impacts the way the body moves.

Aquatic therapy or more known as aqua therapy is the use of water and water-induced resistance to improve physical functioning. Another definition presents aquatic therapy as therapeutic procedure which attempts to improve function through the application of aquatic therapeutic exercises. These procedures require constant attendance of a therapist educated in performing aquatic therapeutic exercises. Commonly used synonyms of aquatic therapy are Aquatic Physical Therapy; Aquatic Rehabilitation, Aqua Therapy, Pool Therapy, Water Therapy (very common term in India), Hydrotherapy (outside US) (Dreeben, 2017).

Although hydrotherapy has been documented as early as 2400 BC, active hydrotherapy began around 1930 in the UK when polio victims were made to exercise in water. The development of modern techniques started with the Halliwick Method (1950) and the Bad Ragaz Ring Method (1955). Today, hydrotherapy is an accepted and popular form of treating various conditions due to an upsurge in research. It is acknowledged by the medical community as a method in which to rehabilitate, or re-educate, the human body. Aquatic therapy presents a near complete reversal of body composition. Water reduces a human's body weight by 90 percent, allowing children and adults to ambulate freely in a way that doesn't place undue stress on the musculoskeletal system from forces such as gravity and body weight. Becker (2009) states that since the earliest recorded history, water has always been believed to promote healing and has therefore been widely used in the management of medical ailments. Through observation and centuries of trial and error, and scientific methodology, traditions of healing through aquatic treatments have evolved. Historically, the field of Physical Medicine viewed hydrotherapy as a central treatment methodology. Scientific foundation of the aquatic therapy benefits are extensively explained in the literature. Nearly all the biological effects of immersion are related to the fundamental principles of hydrodynamics. For the purpose of this paper we will summarize the benefits to : Physical and mental rehabilitation; fitness; relaxation; perceptual motor intervention; self-concept enhancement; fun; competition; ease of movement. The natural properties of water, such as buoyancy and hydrostatic pressure, enhance its therapeutic effect. Buoyancy of the water decreases the impact on joints. Hydrostatic pressure promotes improved circulation, muscle strength and endurance, improved motion, balance and coordination. The recommendations for therapeutic water temperature range among 30-32-35 °C. Water based activity is also said to aid in the relief of pain and muscle spasm, maintain or increase range of motion, strengthen and re-educate weak and/or paralyzed muscles, improve circulation, lung function, and speech, and preserve and improve balance, coordination and posture (Cole & Becker, 2003). Benefits are not limited to the physical realm - contributes to psychosocial and cognitive development. The motivational and therapeutic properties of water

provide a stimulating learning environment. Winnick (2017) reports that some instructors even reinforce academic learning, successfully integrating cognitive concepts during water games and activities centered on math, spelling, reading, and other concepts. While aquatic therapy is particularly popular in dealing with e.g. Rheumatism and Orthopedic problems (Fransen, 2007), therapeutic activity in water is also offered for persons with Stroke, SCI, MS, Parkinson and CP (Daly & Lambeck, 2007). Recreational as well as therapeutic activities are equally at home in water and all ages take part. A water based program provides excellent variety to an exercise program (Gowens & deHueck, 2007). It offers a complete body workout and ranges from gentle walking in water to high-energy exercise. Aquatic facilities exist at or are used by numerous health care centers, major books have been published on rehabilitation in water and numerous courses are offered on "philosophies" of aquatic rehabilitation such as Halliwick, Bad Ragaz Ring Method, and Watsu. Aquatic therapy includes a large hands-on component, especially in neurological and pediatric rehabilitation. In these populations treatment is varied and complex, and aquatic therapy is usually only a minor component. Nonetheless, this might have an important place in long term rehabilitation where the effect of any treatment is smaller in measurable terms.

Quantifying the effect of aquatic therapy has, as a consequence, not gained sufficient attention. In our experience the range of aqua therapies is not well known and popular. For the purpose of this paper aquatic therapy is defined as movement or exercise in a water environment with an intended therapeutic outcome. Water is a medium in which recreational exercise as well as therapeutic activity is equally at home and in which all age levels take part. Aquatic facilities exist at or are used by numerous health care structures.

METHODOLOGY

A desk research was conducted. Online survey using the key words "spa center" and "therapies" was performed in order to define the extend and the variety of therapies offered. Descriptive research based on the author personal experience was applied in order to describe some of the most popular or fashionable aqua therapies which could be successfully applied in the Bulgarian SPA centers.

For the purpose of this study we are also looking to define what is SPA and what a SPA center. According to the English language dictionary (2016) "spa" is a mineral spring or a place or resort where such a spring is found; a luxury resort, a resort providing therapeutic baths or a tub for relaxation or invigoration, usually including a device for raising whirlpools in the water. Despite this fact the spa centers slightly moved away from water. The current spa or also called wellness facilities include a sauna and treatment rooms. The spa and wellness facilities include a sauna and gym. There are offer a range of treatments and massages (Collins English Dictionary). Appears that wellness is the hot new word in the spa business. It's the most powerful argument anyone can make against seeing spas as a mere luxury, a pampering experience. Now many day spas have "wellness" in their name, or call themselves a wellness center. But still the use of spa independently dominates when talking about for a few or more days program to help put you on the path to wellness. Still the spa center is the one that can provide a total immersion experience in a healthy lifestyle. To summarize in the modern business spa centers are gone away from the origin linked with the water. Now they offer spa cuisine that emphasizes whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables and nutritional education; a full program of fitness and stress reduction classes; therapeutic spa treatments including massage; educational lectures that teach you how to develop and maintain healthy habits (Brown, 2016).

Aims and objectives

For the purpose of this paper we performed a research on the variety of the “therapies” offered in the spa centers in Bulgaria and a review of the major aquatic therapies offered in the world in order to present new opportunities for development and rise in their competitiveness on the market.

RESULTS

According to Ralchev (2016) all newly opened hotels no matter the stars rating, all ranging from three to five have one or more spa centers/facility. The old hotels are also upgrading and they open spa centers. As a matter of fact just few hotels in Bulgaria do not have spa facility. From our survey we found that just recently the Ordinance number two from 29 of January 2016 gives an exact definition of a spa center and what is the range of services that this center should offer. This Ordinance define the spa center is a center where various procedures, programs are applied and rituals **involving the use of water** - mineral, spring and other, allowed of the law, and / or curative mud and / or seawater and / or other natural natural resources factors, by applying classic and untraditional methods of influence, anti-stress, relaxation, and psycho-physical recovery, as well as targeted the beauty of the human body. Led by the definition we found that in Sofia only 21 spa centers have water facility as swimming pools of different sizes. The most common facility is the sauna and the steam bath. All therapies offered are beauty procedures but we didn't found even one including water. In order to respond to the national standard we made an attempt to give an overview to real aqua therapies. We want to drown up your attention to: Bad Ragaz Ring method, Halliwick concept, Passive relaxation methods as Jahara technique; Watsu; Oceanic Rebalancing; Aquasage; Aquamouvance; Waterdancing; Hydrorelax; Waving and the recently very popular Ai-Chi.

The *Bad Ragaz Ring Method* (BRRM) was developed in its basic form in Germany around 1950. It started as a way to strengthen muscles in simple, one-dimensional patterns. Clients are put in a flotation device and exercise in a supine position. The therapist restrains the movement as the client moves through the water. In 1957, the method was introduced in the Health Spa Centre of Bad Ragaz in Switzerland. In the early sixties, three-dimensional patterns were added to the movements, based on the ideas of Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation (PNF). Further alterations in the method took place around 1975, described by the physiotherapist, Beatrice Egger. In 1990, she wrote a book about the New BRRM, and the updates are now available on CD-ROM and could be found at www.halliwick.net/cdrom.asp. The goals of the BRRM are: muscle strengthening and re-education; increasing range of motion; tone reduction and relaxation; to improve alignment and stability.

The *Halliwick Concept* is an approach to teaching all people, with a particular focus on those people with physical disabilities or learning difficulties: to participate in water activities; to move independently in water; to swim. This method is based on the opinion that activities in water are beneficial to wellbeing and the Halliwick Concept sets out the fundamentals for learning water skills. The benefits of activities in water are: physical, personal, recreational, social, therapeutic. The Halliwick Concept was developed by James McMillan (England), in 1950, when he introduced his Ten-Point-Program. Since 1975, the Concept expanded to hydrotherapy techniques and developed specific therapeutic exercises. The Concept has spread across the world and consequently, in 1994, the International Halliwick Association was established in Bad Ragaz, Switzerland. The official website and source of information is <http://www.halliwick.org>.

Jahara technique is a method that teaches bodily awareness in water. Jahara is rooted in the understanding of two fundamental elements: body mechanics and physical properties of water. A flexible floatation device called a 'third arm' is used to provide the participant's body with support. This allows the therapist to move the participant without effort and generates a sense of lightness. Gentle and continuous traction of the spine results in 'expansion' and release of the muscular-skeletal system. Jahara's philosophy is summarized in the following concepts: expansion; support; effortlessness; invisibility and adaptability. The official website and source of information is <http://www.jahara.com>.

Watsu is a technique which is derived from "WATER shiatSU". In the 1980s, Harold Dull (USA), a Zen-Shiatsu master who did Shiatsu stretches in a pool, developed the Watsu method. He found that the combination of these stretches, applying Shiatsu massage and gentle movements could bring about deep relaxation. Simply put, Watsu it is a floating massage. It is always performed with the help of the therapist: the participant floats comfortably in a large pool of warm water while his/her muscles are massaged; the joints are mobilized and tissues stretched; energy pathways are opened, and the whole body is moved gently through the water. Today Watsu is practiced by more than 1000 trained and certified practitioners on 6 continents, in: public hot springs and backyard pools; hospitals and physical therapy clinics and beauty and wellness spas.

Ai-Chi is a form of active relaxation therapy, derived from Tai-Chi. Relaxation is brought about through a series of slow movements, combined with breathing techniques. Progression is achieved by increasing the choreography of the movements. It is a hands-off technique that can easily be applied to community based programs. Other techniques that also focus on the combination of breathing, postural control and relaxation are: *Wat-shi-gong*; *Aquatic Feldenkrais* (<http://www.feldenkrais.com>); Aquatic Pilates and the previously described Halliwick.

Aqua motion is using the water to increase balance and coordination, reducing the risk of falls in the course of daily activity. Arthritis program is working with the buoyancy of the water to improve movement and relieve pain. *Cardio Endurance Training* in water is burning calories and is improving lean muscle mass. *Sensory Swim* is Introducing infants and toddlers to new movements while having fun in the water. Probably the most popular *Water Aerobics* is using the resistance of the water to improve strength and create a well-rounded cardiovascular workout.

The inclusion of some of the above mentioned aqua therapies and practices are meaningful way of the Bulgarian SPA centres to respond to the newly adopted national standards and to increase their level of competitiveness on the market.

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