(W27) STRATEGIES FOR YOGA TEACHERS: ADAPTIVE MAT YOGA FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS
K. Summers,1 D. Zwick,2 K. Clarke,3 J. Zembruski-Ruple4

1Research and Clinical Programs, National Multiple Sclerosis Society, New York, NY; 2Tenafly, NJ; 3Ledyard, CT; 4New York City Chapter, National Multiple Sclerosis Society, New York, NY

Background: Regular physical activity is increasingly recognized as an important adjunct to traditional medical and other therapeutic interventions for people living with multiple sclerosis (MS). For many MS patients with mild symptoms, yoga is an attractive and important exercise option. To promote a comfortable, ongoing exercise experience for people with MS, it is important to educate wellness teachers about the disease and how it may affect participation in exercise programs. Objectives: To provide chapters of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society with an instructional program to engage community yoga teachers who would like to learn more about working with people with MS. After participating in the program, community yoga teachers will be able to describe key aspects of MS, recognize some of the challenges caused by MS symptoms, and adapt yoga poses to meet the needs of people with mild symptoms of MS. Methods: A work group consisting of two chapter program staff members and six health and wellness professionals experienced in working with people with MS in yoga and/or rehabilitation settings was convened to develop a curriculum for community yoga teachers interested in learning more about MS. A trainer-led, 6-hour, in-person program with accompanying materials was developed by this group, which focused on the needs of people with mild symptoms of MS (a training program focused on more advanced MS is also planned). Ten yoga poses common to most yoga traditions were selected to illustrate how a pose might be adapted to accommodate MS symptoms such as balance issues, weakness, spasticity, and so on, and help maximize participation. A manual was also developed that included photographs of the selected poses and adaptations. Results: The first pilot program, limited to 15 yoga teachers, was held in New York City in November 2009. Topics addressed in the program included an overview of MS, “trying-on” the symptoms of MS, adaptation of poses, hands-on workshop with people with mild symptoms of MS; and disability etiquette and accessibility concerns. Per the program evaluation, the program successfully met the needs of the target audience. Conclusions: Participant and trainer feedback and recommendations are being reviewed, and the program will be adjusted as needed. The program will be piloted at two other chapter locations in 2010.

Supported by: National Multiple Sclerosis Society and PVA Education Foundation, grant 623

Disclosure: Nothing to disclose

Keywords: complementary/alternative therapies in MS, rehabilitation strategies and therapy and MS