In a programme of research investigating the benefits for people with Parkinson’s of taking part in dance classes, Dr Peter Lovatt and Dr Lucy Annett have carried out two studies in which participants attended a series of dance classes and were monitored on a range of physical and psychological outcome measures. The first paper based on this work was published in 2014 (Lewis et al., 2014) and other papers are currently in preparation and under review. Improvements in mobility, quality of life and cognition were observed after participants had completed 10 dance classes. However, improvements were not found on all measures, in particular balance and some Parkinson’s motor symptoms remained unchanged. The results differ in this respect from findings reported by other groups.

The conclusions are that further research is required to investigate the mechanisms underlying the benefits of dance for Parkinson’s that may account for the varied profile of improvements, in particular the relative contributions of physiological (exercise) and psychological (social interaction) factors.

As part of this on-going program of work, the research team at the University of Hertfordshire are addressing questions such as what types of movement, activity and dance are most beneficial for people with Parkinson’s disease, how much dance (activity) is necessary to see improvements in the physical and psychological symptoms of Parkinson’s disease and why do some people benefit from engaging in dance-based activities and others do not? In research towards her PhD, Amelia Hall has investigated the benefits of dance and movement to music for people with Parkinson’s and found significant improvements in mood. In a new PhD research project, Rebecca Hadley is using wrist-worn accelerometers to quantify movement by people with Parkinson’s as they undertake dance and other physical activities, and to track any change in movement across the subsequent hours and days in the week following the activities.

Our aim is to set up a Research Advisory Group that will guide the next stages of our academic research programme investigating Dance for Parkinson’s. This group will help inform the development of our research programme and funding plans so that we can make significant applications for research funding from the relevant funding councils and charities. We envisage the Research Advisory Group to meet on up to two occasions (mid March) to help shape the teams’ research plans. A day conference at the University of Hertfordshire is planned for June, to which the steering group and a wider audience will be invited, to discuss our research plans and related research on the topic of Dance for Parkinson’s.

For more information, please contact Amelia Hall at Dance@herts.ac.uk