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November 30, 2009

Josephine Briggs, MD, Director  
National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine  
National Institutes of Health  
Members, NCCAM Strategic Planning Team  
9000 Rockville Pike  
Bethesda, Maryland 20892

Dear Dr. Briggs and the Strategic Planning Team,

We are writing in response to your solicitation of stakeholder input into Priority Setting for the next strategic plan for the NIH National Center of Complementary and Alternative Medicine

The International Association of Yoga Therapists (IAYT), with 2,300 members in the U.S. alone, serves as a professional organization for Yoga teachers and Yoga therapists worldwide. Membership has tripled since 2003. We have published the *International Journal of Yoga Therapy* since 1990, the only professional and scientific journal dedicated to Yoga as a healing practice. IAYT has also hosted an annual Symposium on Yoga Therapy and Research (SYTAR) since 2007, attracting an average of over 600 participants each year. We see ourselves as a significant stakeholder in NCCAM.

First, we are writing in support of the top shared priorities identified by the Academic Consortium for Complementary and Alternative Health Care (ACCAHC). They apply to Yoga as well as the licensed CAM disciplines.

- Research on whole practices
- Costs, cost effectiveness, cost off-sets and cost savings
- Infrastructure and capacity – including the development of researchers in both licensed and unlicensed fields

Yoga therapy is an emerging profession in the U.S., actively engaged in the self-regulatory process. IAYT has been a member of the ACCAHC since 2006. Together with the Yoga Alliance (YA) and the National Ayurvedic Medical Association (NAMA), we are the Traditional World Medicines Group within ACCAHC.

Second, we are writing to stress the “real world” priorities for research on Yoga based upon two key factors identified in the solicitation – Scientific Promise and Extent and Nature of Practice and Use.

### **Scientific Promise**

First, we note the role Yoga can play in integrative approaches to healthy lifestyle changes, including stress management. Perhaps the most well known example is in the work of Dean Ornish, MD, and colleagues at the Preventive Medicine Research Institute. Yoga inspired the practices for stress management - stretching, deep breathing, meditation and deep relaxation. Those lifestyle changes have been shown to reverse coronary heart disease and effect the progression of early low grade prostate cancer.<sup>1</sup> As Dr. Ornish recently testified, the potential for such integrated approaches for disease prevention is enormous. “Last year, \$2.1 trillion were spent in this country on medical care, or 16.5% of the gross national product and 95 cents of every dollar were spent to treat disease after it had already occurred. Heart disease, diabetes, prostate cancer, breast cancer and obesity accounts for 75% of these health care costs, yet these are largely preventable and even reversible by changing diet and lifestyle.”<sup>2</sup>

Second, as presented at a recent scientific Symposium on Yoga as a Therapeutic Intervention at the May 2009, North American Research Conference on Complementary and Integrative Medicine (NARCCIM), there are numerous intriguing opportunities for explicit uses of Yoga for mental health, cardiovascular health, musculoskeletal and neurologic disorders, coping with cancer and other life threatening diseases and much more.<sup>3</sup> While the popular practice of Yoga has passed the “market test”, these therapeutic applications of Yoga need more research in order to gain a deeper scientific understanding and support for wider acceptance and utilization by our healthcare system.<sup>4</sup>

There is significant interest in Yoga research. There were 100 people in the audience at that Yoga symposium at NARCCIM. At IAYT’s own annual Symposium on Yoga Therapy and Research, the research track has drawn about 50 attendees three years in a row (2007-2009), mostly Yoga researchers. In the past two conferences, over 40 research abstracts were submitted each year for oral or poster presentation.

There is also widespread and growing scientific interest in meditation for health purposes. For example, note that on July 8–9, 2008, NCCAM held a 2-day workshop in Bethesda, Maryland on meditation for health purposes. It was co-sponsored by the National Cancer Institute (NCI), the National Institute on Aging (NIA), the NIH Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences (OBSSR), and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (INMHA, ICRH).<sup>5</sup>

### **Extent and Nature of Practice and Use.**

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<sup>1</sup>Preventative Medicine Research Institute website. [www.pMRI.org/research.html](http://www.pMRI.org/research.html). November, 28, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Dean Ornish, MD. US Senate Healthcare Reform Testimony on Integrative Care: A Pathway to a Healthier Nation. February 26, 2009. Reprinted in the *International Journal of Yoga Therapy*, No 19, (2009), pp 43-46.

<sup>3</sup> Khalsa, Sat Bir Singh. Presentation at the Symposium on Research on Yoga as a Therapeutic Intervention, May 13, 2009, North American Research Conference on Complementary and Integrative Medicine..

<sup>4</sup> Khalsa, Sat Bir Singh. “Why Do Yoga Research: Who Cares and What Good is It?” *International Journal of Yoga Therapy*, No 17, (2007), pp 19-20.

<sup>5</sup> Meditation for Health Purposes Workshop — July 8–9, 2008. Executive Summary. NCCAM website, November 28, 2009.

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Josephine Briggs, MD, Director

Yoga is a well known and popular CAM therapy, practiced by 6.1% of the adult population.<sup>6</sup> Two other classic Yogic practices are also very popular, deep breathing, at 12.7 %, and meditation at 9.4%. Moreover, these practices represent three out of four top ten CAM therapies that showed significant increases from the same study done five years earlier.<sup>7</sup>

Yoga can be a fitness practice, a wellness practice, a therapeutic practice and/or a spiritual practice. While Yoga is not “healthcare” as conventionally viewed, the practice is used by over 15 million adults as an enjoyable and low cost means to help maintain their health and complement their healthcare.<sup>8</sup> As an example, we are pleased to note that pictures of individuals practicing Yoga are prominently featured on the NCCAM website.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate. Please feel free to contact us if we can provide you with further information that will assist the NIH NCCAM strategic planning process.

Sincerely,

John Kepner, MA, MBA  
Executive Director

Matthew J. Taylor, PT, PhD  
President, Board of Directors

Cc: Elizabeth A. Goldblatt, PhD, MPA/HA, Chair, ACCAHC  
John Weeks, Executive Director, ACCAHC  
R. Mark Davis, President, Yoga Alliance  
Devi Mueller, President, National Ayurvedic Medical Association

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<sup>6</sup> *Complementary and Alternative Medicine Use Among Adults and Children: United States, 2007*, Barnes PM, Bloom B, Nahin R. CDC National Health Statistics Report #12, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Khalsa, Sat Bir Singh. Presentation at the Symposium on Research on Yoga as a Therapeutic Intervention, May 13, 2009, North American Research Conference on Complementary and Integrative Medicine.

<sup>8</sup> Yoga Journal releases 2008 “Yoga in America” market study, *Yoga Journal* press release, 2/28/2008.