

## Editorial

# New Efforts to Support IAYT's Mission, Our Members, and the Public

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As a tax-exempt, nonprofit organization, the work of IAYT revolves around providing the services required to support our mission and our members and serve the public. Let me take this opportunity to outline some of IAYT's new efforts, discuss why we initiated each

project, and recognize the work of our new colleagues.

### Taking the Journal to Peer Review

Commencing with the 2006 issue of the *International Journal of Yoga Therapy*, all contributions will be peer reviewed. Peer review is the touchstone of professional journals and a first step toward having articles indexed in academic and professional databases. This will provide much greater professional recognition for the discipline of Yoga therapy as a whole as well as for the individual articles appearing in the journal. Our goal is to enhance the quality of the articles without losing their practical relevance for our members. With a strong background in science, editing, and Yoga, Kelly McGonigal, Ph.D., our new editor in chief, is uniquely qualified to lead this effort.

Please remember, however, that the journal has *always* been professionally edited and has a 15-year history of presenting the best available articles on Yoga ther-

apy. Trisha Lamb, and the editors before her, have done a tremendous job with very few resources.

### Supporting Our Members

A key part of the work of a professional association is supporting members and serving as an information clearinghouse for the field. In this day and age, much of this revolves around websites, databases, and communication systems. Knowledgeable support also requires experience and creativity. In addition to having a strong background in science and Yoga, Pam Byard, Ph.D., has years of creative experience with the technical side of member services as well as the training of Yoga therapists. We are most fortunate to have such an experienced person to serve as our new associate director.

### Providing an Organized Voice for Yoga in National Health Care Policy

Representing the profession externally is one of the key roles of a professional association. It has long been my observation, however, that Yoga has not been represented in national health care policy discussions (in the U.S.) on integrative, complementary, and alternative medicine. One reason is that despite the widespread popularity of Yoga, the discipline has not had the organizational structure or financial ability to participate in these hearings and conferences. As the saying goes, "You have to pay to play."

While I am hesitant to describe Yoga therapy as "health care," especially in the political and regulatory sense of that

term, Yoga indisputably provides many tools for the care of health as well as much support for healing in multiple dimensions. Yoga simply has too much to offer to be left out of integrated efforts at health care, especially when there is an explicit interest in supporting the healing of the whole person. It is important to note that the *first* guiding principle of the 2002 White House Commission on Complementary and Alternative Medicine Policy was “a wholeness orientation in health care delivery. Health involves all aspects of life, mind, body, spirit and environment—and high quality health care must support care of the whole person.”

IAYT is now beginning to make appearances in this arena. In June 2005, our president, Veronica Zador, and her husband, Ivan Zador, Ph.D. (a professor of biomechanical engineering with long experience in academic medicine and professional associations), attended the National Educational Dialogue (NED) to Advance Integrated Health Care. In a groundbreaking move, IAYT was one of the cosponsors of this event, along with the Yoga Alliance. Yoga was the only unlicensed discipline participating, and we believe this is the first time Yoga has been represented at an event of this kind. A report on this meeting is available on our website.

### **Representing Your Interests as “CAM Therapists” in Health Care Policy**

The 2005 report by the Institute of Medicine on Complementary and Alternative Medicine in the United States recommends:

“... that national professional associations for all CAM disciplines ensure the presence of

training standards and develop practice guidelines. Health care professional licensing boards and accrediting and certifying agencies (for both CAM and conventional medicine) should set competency standards in the appropriate use of both conventional medicine and CAM therapies, consistent with practitioners’ scope of practice and standards of referrals across health professions.”

As many members know, creating training standards for the diverse set of teaching methodologies under the Yoga umbrella was extremely challenging for the Yoga Alliance. It will be just as challenging when the focus turns to creating training standards for Yoga therapists, and perhaps to the other IOM recommended considerations, including practice guidelines, scope of practice, and standards for referrals.

In 2004, IAYT took the first steps toward the consideration of training standards for Yoga therapists by publishing a series of articles on the subject on our website, including “Illustrative Standards for Yoga Therapists.” Since then, we have taken time to reflect on our initial efforts and listen to members and advisors on this subject.

We also are following the discussions among health care policy makers on the issue of credentialing CAM providers. This has led to IAYT’s decision to participate in professional forums with other “established” CAM disciplines, such as the recent NED event, and learn about their experiences. In addition, we are very interested in how this issue is being addressed around the globe and offer several fine articles about this on our website, with more to come.

### **Listening to Members and Our Advisory Council**

A key part of our work is listening to members. Whenever we hold a board meeting, we invite members in the local area to an informal gathering afterward, where we get to know each other and discuss issues of interest. We also learn about what is important to members through their email messages and phone calls.

We also have renewed our Advisory Council—a group of knowledgeable members we can call on occasionally for guidance. One of the roles of the Advisory Council is to help IAYT maintain a broad, diverse, in-depth, and international perspective in supporting our mission, our members, and the public. Members of the council are listed on the inside front cover of the journal as well as on our website.

### **Working with Other Organizations**

#### ***Yoga Alliance***

In recent years, IAYT and the Yoga Alliance have begun to work closely together on standards for the training of Yoga therapists and in other areas of common interest. While the process is not expected to be the same, the “Illustrative Standards for Yoga Therapists” at IAYT’s website uses the Yoga Alliance’s RYT-500 standards as a foundation. In my view, it is paramount that we work together and not create conflicting standards. It is also important that we work together when representing Yoga in health care policy forums. Working together keeps our external messages clear and consistent. It also makes a strong statement that coop-

erative professional support for the discipline as a whole is well established. Finally, the ability to work together can be essential in simply making public appearances financially affordable.

### **National Ayurvedic Medical Association**

In principle, much of the work of IAYT as a professional association supporting members and representing an emerging CAM therapy could parallel the work of the National Ayurvedic Medical Association (NAMA). Some individual members of IAYT are members of NAMA, and we also are beginning to explore organizational relationships in order to discuss common issues and share complementary work. For example, many of our experiences at the NED meeting and our articles on financial support for Yoga therapy (described below) have direct applicability to Ayurveda.

### **NCCAM**

In their new Strategic Plan, the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM), part of the United States National Institutes of Health (NIH), defines Yoga as “a mind-body practice that combines breathing techniques, physical posture, and meditation. *Originating in Ayurvedic medicine* (emphasis added), yoga is intended to calm the nervous system and balance the body, mind and spirit.”

While we appreciate the inclusion of a definition of Yoga in the NCCAM Strategic Plan, it could use some revision, as Yoga and Ayurveda are classically considered sister sciences and there is more to Yoga than breathing, postures, and meditation.

More to the point, however, IAYT would like to promote a greater understanding of Yoga by NCCAM, NIH, and the biomedical community in general. Similarly, we will continue to support a better understanding and appreciation among Yoga professionals of the contributions medical science can make to Yoga. Indeed, IAYT has been doing this since the first issue of the journal was published in 1990.

In this same plan, NCCAM indicates that “partnerships should be sought with professional associations.” We agree, and IAYT has just begun to more formally explore such a partnership with NCCAM.

### **Publishing NCCAM Supported Research on Yoga**

In this issue is an invited article on one of the current Yoga research efforts supported by NCCAM. See “Tales from the Trenches: Conducting Yoga Research on Chronic Low Back Pain: An Interview with Karen Sherman, Ph.D., and Robin Rothenberg.” This is a fine example of the kinds of articles our journal brings that are complementary to articles Yoga researchers publish in mainstream medical journals. Articles in the *International Journal of Yoga Therapy* can discuss the methodology and the “story behind the story” in much greater depth than would be possible elsewhere.

I found Karen Sherman and Robin Rothenberg’s collaborative story a fascinating and educational discussion of all the work and many considerations involved in carrying out a rigorous research project. In my own work as a Yoga therapist, help for chronic low back pain is the single most common request I receive. I thus also found this article to be a person-

ally instructive example of some of the best practices I have seen for providing Yoga as a therapeutic intervention to a mainstream population.

### **Articulating Financial Support Options for Yoga Therapy**

At almost every gathering we have held with members, the lack of coverage for Yoga therapy by conventional health insurance is a primary topic of discussion. There appears to be a widespread perception that Yoga therapy is unfairly excluded from coverage and that coverage would be a positive development. This is a very complicated and often controversial subject. My personal concern is that such coverage, and all the inherent requirements and limitations, will prove a Faustian bargain.

The economic forces inherent in most third-party payment arrangements tend to support only measurable, mechanistic solutions to multidimensional problems and goals, thereby significantly restricting what a Yoga teacher or therapist may offer. Another concern is the extensive record keeping and documentation required for insurance reimbursement.

Fortunately, there are many other avenues of financial support for Yoga therapy. Among these are tax sheltered health spending accounts, Yoga therapy provided directly by licensed health care professionals, and Yoga therapy provided by Yoga therapists working under the supervision of licensed health care professionals. Many of these options are not well known, however, among Yoga professionals, much less among their students. Because the economic viability of Yoga therapy is a key consideration for the profession as a whole, this issue of the journal brings a series of invited complementary arti-

cles on this topic. We hope this series will be of practical interest and valuable service to our members and their students.

### **Providing a Legal Opinion Supporting Yoga Therapy as a Qualified Medical Expense**

One potentially significant means of financial support for Yoga therapy is tax-sheltered spending accounts such as Health Savings Accounts, Medical Savings Accounts, Flexible Spending Arrangements, and Health Reimbursement Arrangements. Eligibility depends on the conditions under which expenses for Yoga therapy qualify as medical expenses, as defined by the U.S. tax code and interpreted by the Internal Revenue Service. It is ultimately a legal question.

To serve our members, their students, and the public, IAYT commissioned a legal opinion on this subject that we are publishing in this issue. Members are welcome to copy this opinion to share with students interested in using their tax sheltered spending accounts to pay for Yoga therapy services. The purpose of publishing this opinion is to provide education in this complicated and confusing area. It is, of course, important to understand that the opinion cannot be considered tax advice for any given person or situation. Members needing such tax advice are encouraged to seek individual counsel.

### **Examining the Theory and Philosophy of Yoga Therapy**

“What is Yoga therapy?” is a perennial consideration for IAYT, our members, and the profession as a whole. In this issue we are fortunate

to present “The Yoga of Healing: Exploring Yoga’s Holistic Model for Health and Well-Being: An Introduction” by Kausthub Desikachar with the assistance of Liz Bragdon and Chase Bossart. This is the longest article we have ever carried in the journal, and we trust you will find it well worthwhile. It brings a wide-ranging and thought-provoking discussion and is a fine example of the in-depth theoretical and philosophical articles published in the journal to serve our mission and members.

With this issue in hand, I suggest contrasting one of the central themes of Kausthub Desikachar’s article—the focus on adapting Yoga to the individual—with the emphasis on treatment protocols for group classes that characterizes most Western medical research, as described in “Tales from the Trenches,” the interview with Karen Sherman and Robin Rothenberg on their NIH-sponsored research. Then review how Robin, a Yoga therapist who is well trained and well experienced in working with individuals, handled this issue in the context of the carefully developed research effort. Finally, contrast the latter with Robin’s group Yoga therapy classes, as described in her article “Therapeutic Yoga 101: A Course in Self-Acceptance” in the 2004 issue of the journal.

### **Helping the Public Find a Qualified Yoga Therapist**

Another important role of a professional association is assisting the public in finding qualified practitioners. The difficulties of determining a “qualified Yoga therapist” are well known to our members. The discipline cannot be narrowly defined, and the approaches and training of practitioners vary widely.

Consider, for example, the different approaches that might be brought to students/clients with chronic low back pain by Yoga teachers or Yoga therapists trained in the methodologies commonly referred to as Iyengar, Viniyoga, Integrative Yoga Therapy, and Phoenix Rising Yoga Therapy, to name just a few. To complicate this further, some of the most well trained and experienced Yoga teachers are not comfortable using the term “Yoga therapist,” even though they may be well known for their abilities in teaching therapeutic applications.

To assist the public in locating a Yoga teacher, Yoga therapist, or health professional using Yoga in his or her practice, IAYT provides a searchable online directory of members. Members have the option of presenting their in-depth professional profile in response to the search function, which allows the public to search for practitioners *with the qualifications important to them*.

In addition, it is important to remember that many of our members are pioneers in the field of Yoga therapy. The search function thus also serves as a wonderful member networking tool for practitioners and researchers.

To make this new search tool work for you as a member, you must grant us permission to display your profile by checking the designated box in the “Contact Information” section of your online member record. You must also select one or more categories that apply to you that may be searched: Yoga practitioner, Yoga teacher, Yoga therapist, Health Professional, Researcher. In addition, you must first fill out your online profile before we can display it. This takes some effort, but it is well worth the time invested. While

there are many searchable Yoga teacher databases on the web, we believe the IAYT search function provides a uniquely in-depth service from a respected, credible source.

### Saying Goodbye to Trisha

By the time you read this, Trisha Lamb should be well along

in her transition to serving us all on a different plane. She will be in meditation retreat in the mountains not far from our office in Prescott, Arizona. She put her heart and soul into serving IAYT in so many ways. IAYT would not be where it is today without her many years of selfless service, and she deserves a long break from the material world.

She can be a night owl, as some of you know, and I will miss those email exchanges at 7 a.m., when I am just starting my day in the office, and she is just finishing hers, at 5 a.m., two time zones away.

In Yoga,

John Kepner



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION  
OF YOGA THERAPISTS

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