



## americanviniyogainstitute

Date: March 10, 2016

To: American Viniyoga Institute (AVI) Alumni

From: Gary Kraftsow, MA, RYS-500, Founder and Director AVI

Subject: **Recently Announced Yoga Alliance (YA) new Yoga Therapy Policy (See Attachment A)**

There has been some concern, and even confusion, about the new Yoga Alliance (YA) policy regarding Yoga Therapy. As you all know, I have been a supporter of both YA and The International Association of Yoga Therapists (IAYT) since the inception of both organizations. Having said that, I have not always been in full agreement with either organizations' policies or actions.

At the time that YA was formed in 1997, the thought was that we should define our profession as Yoga Teachers before it was defined for us by outside organizations. YA took a "big tent" approach, trying to be as inclusive as possible while maintaining a minimum standard of education. Today, the mission of YA is to promote and support the integrity and diversity of the teaching of yoga. They currently work to prevent attempts to regulate and license Yoga Teacher training programs as vocational training, and offer educational as well as business support to YA members.

I was a part of the early development of IAYT in 1989. The thought was to bridge the authentic tradition of Yoga Therapy with western health care. IAYT recognized that Yoga Therapy, though a subset of Yoga, was a different skill set that required a much greater level of clinical education beyond Yoga Teacher Training. Their efforts have been to define that education, accredit programs that offer that education, and ultimately credential Yoga Therapists.

The message implied in YA's new policy, and the way it was announced, have caused concern within the Yoga community. Nonetheless, I see this as a positive step for both IAYT and the emerging profession of Yoga Therapy. By distancing themselves from Yoga Therapy, YA has in effect made IAYT the national organization responsible for defining the Yoga Therapist profession, the knowledge base that it is drawn from, the scope of practice, and the minimum standards of education to be a Yoga Therapist.

Like many of you, I had concerns about this new policy, which led to several extensive phone calls with YA Spokesperson, Andrew Tanner. I now feel confident to say:

- The new YA policy is a good thing for the professions of both Yoga Teachers and Yoga Therapists.
- AVI will comply with the new YA policy and make the required edits to AVI's YA profile, our syllabus, and our marketing materials.
- AVI encourages AVI alumni to comply with the new YA policy and to work with YA to make the required edits to your individual YA profile and marketing materials.



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- AVI recognizes the importance of Yoga Teachers becoming Registered Yoga Teachers (RYT) and encourages Yoga Teacher students to become familiar with the YA guidelines for becoming RYT.
- AVI recognizes the importance of Yoga Therapists becoming Certified Individual Yoga Therapists (C-IAYT) and encourages Yoga Therapy students to become familiar with the IAYT guidelines for becoming C-IAYT. Our understanding is that IAYT will soon announce their grandfathering program for becoming a C-IAYT for those trained as Yoga Therapists prior to the IAYT school accreditation process.

My hope remains that YA and IAYT work together in a supportive and respectful way. I encourage YA to publically acknowledge IAYT as the professional organization for Yoga Therapy training, and refer YA members to IAYT if they are interested in understanding and or pursuing professional Yoga Therapy training.

If you have questions about updating your YA profile, please contact the YA Member Services team at 1-888-921-9642 or email [info@yogaalliance.org](mailto:info@yogaalliance.org) and a customer service representative will walk you through the necessary changes.

AVI is here to support you with questions or concerns about this new YA policy. Please send your concerns to AVI at [info@viniyoga.com](mailto:info@viniyoga.com). The AVI team will keep me apprised of any issues you face, and I am open to talking with both YA and IAYT representatives again should that need arise.

I hope this information is helpful to you.

May good things happen!

Gary Kraftsow  
Founder and Director  
American Viniyoga Institute



**Attachment A:  
Overview of YA's New Yoga Therapy Policy (as shown on YA web site March 10, 2016)**

### Overview of the New Yoga Therapy Policy

*January 25, 2016*

Over the last year, Yoga Alliance Registry (a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization) has become concerned about the growing use of the words “yoga therapy” and “yoga therapist” in the market. Based on in-depth research and the Registry, Yoga Alliance Registry has adopted a new policy.

Going forward, any teacher or school registered with Yoga Alliance Registry must remove the terms “yoga therapy,” “yoga therapist” and related words from their profile on the Yoga Alliance Registry Directory. Registrants using these words on their own website or in marketing materials must add a disclaimer explaining the source of their “therapy” training. If there is no disclaimer, they need to remove this language entirely. Full details are available [here](#) and in the [FAQs](#) on the website.

Brandon Hartsell, Chair of the Yoga Alliance Registry Board commented, “I think we all agree that yoga has significant therapeutic benefits for general health and well-being. It is at the core of why we teach yoga. That is not in question. The issue is that the Registry’s mission is to protect and inform the public; we made the decision in keeping with that mission. Teachers and schools using the terms “therapy” and “therapist” may be unintentionally misleading the public about their qualifications and expertise. The term “therapy” implies the treatment or diagnosis of mental or physical health conditions, and this type of training is not part of our RYT or RYS Standards.”

Andrew Tanner, a spokesperson for Yoga Alliance who is himself a Registered Yoga Teacher added, “The Registry was established to serve the public interest. By providing greater clarity and information, the Registry’s decision is in the best interests of everyone: students, practitioners and teachers alike. Confusion about the meaning of the terms ‘yoga therapy’ and ‘yoga therapist’ creates risk for Yoga Alliance members and the yoga community as a whole, with the potential for lawsuits or state charges against individual yoga teachers or schools using these terms. As well, use of these terms has the potential to trigger state regulation of yoga.”

Several key factors contributed to Yoga Alliance Registry’s adoption of the new policy:

- The terms “yoga therapy,” “yoga therapist,” “therapeutic yoga” and similar terms suggest that the yoga instructor can diagnose and/or treat a mental or physical health condition. Those claims fall within the scope of practice of medicine or other regulated health care professions. Any yoga instructor making these types of claims without an appropriate license risks a charge of the unauthorized practice of medicine.
- Practicing medicine is highly regulated in most states, and there have been many cases of individuals, often in less traditional health-related occupations, who have been charged with practicing medicine without a license. There are several examples of these on our website. So far few of these cases have involved yoga practitioners, but increasing use of “yoga therapy” language increases the risk.
- “Therapist” in most people’s minds implies a significant degree of training and certification and some medical training to diagnose, treat or cure specific mental or physical health conditions. There is currently no governmentally recognized designation or training program for yoga therapy, and there are concerns that this could cause confusion among the public about the kinds of services and medical benefits being offered.
- Until there is a clear definition of yoga therapy that makes obvious the difference between yoga therapy and the practice of yoga, the term “yoga therapy” increases the likelihood of regulation. No-one knows exactly what this would mean, but regulation almost always means a more narrow definition of practice, more fees and more bureaucracy. In that case, teaching yoga could be limited to only a few instead of many.

Tanner added, “We know our community will have a lot of questions about this and we are happy to answer them.” Yoga Alliance Registry will be holding two webinars and will also be updating its FAQs regularly. Please check out [the website](#) where you can find a summary of the research, relevant articles, legal cases and FAQs.