

An Overview of IAYT's Efforts to Support the Development of Standards for the Training of Yoga Therapists

by John Kepner, Executive Director

IAYT is supporting work to develop standards for the training of Yoga therapists in many ways and with careful attention to foundations, communication, and education. Perhaps it will be helpful to our membership to outline those efforts for all to review.

Meetings with Schools

One key foundation is providing a forum and an effective process where Yoga therapist program directors can be heard, listen to each other, learn from experts, and get to know each other personally. The first and second Meeting with Schools at SYTAR 2008 and 2009 provided these forums. Supportive subject-matter experts facilitated both meetings of Yoga therapy as an emerging profession.

SYTAR

IAYT's first conference, SYTAR 2007, led off with a panel discussion of "What is Yoga Therapy?" IAYT followed that up by publishing a broad definition of Yoga therapy in the December 2007 issue of Yoga Therapy in Practice (YTIP). This definition is also published on iayt.org under Publications/Articles/Yoga Therapy.

SYTAR 2007 also had presentations by two national leaders in the field of emerging healthcare professions: John Weeks and Pamela Snider, ND, both from the Academic Consortium for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (ACCAHC). Yoga, represented by IAYT, was the first unlicensed discipline to join ACCAHC. We followed that by printing an interview with Dr. Snider in the June 2007 issue of YTIP called "Accountability and Soul," which directly addresses the issue of "Are complementary healthcare disciplines strengthened or compromised as they become established professions?"

Knowledge, Skills, and Competencies

SYTAR 2008 and 2009 led off with plenary sessions, "As a Yoga Therapist, This is What I Do." These demonstrations of the actual practice of Yoga therapy drew upon a wide range of what can be classified as knowledge, skills, and competencies. Much of the work at IAYT's second Meeting with Schools was drawing out and listing the core knowledge, skills, and competencies of Yoga thera-

pists. This is slow, difficult, and often controversial work, but all fields must go through this in order to develop as a profession.

Annual Surveys of Yoga Therapist Training Programs

IAYT has published the results of two annual surveys of Yoga therapist training programs; the latest is on iayt.org now. Since there are no widely recognized training standards, a key purpose of the survey is to present a bird's eye view of comparable information on the different programs to aid prospective students in choosing a school. A second purpose is to better understand the development of our field, because today's training programs reflect our present and influence our future.

Articles

There is a growing collection of articles and perspectives on this in IAYT publications. IAYT even commissioned an article by one of the leading lawyers in the field of complementary and alternative medicine, "The Search for Regulatory Recognition of Yoga Therapy: Legal and Policy Issues," by Michael Cohen, in the 2007 International Journal of Yoga Therapy. Presenting such articles is an important part of our effort to support well-informed communication and decisions.

Digital Resources Library

There is a group on the digital resources library (DRL) devoted to this process, called Member Schools and the Council of Schools Initiative. Postings in this group's webspace are visible to all and provide transparency for the process. All of the significant articles that IAYT has published on standards and our process are posted there. Some of the schools have even posted position papers and there is also a discussion forum. Everyone can follow this process, but only IAYT members can upload papers and contribute to the discussion threads.

Financing

The initial financial support came from IAYT but now this is mostly provided by the schools themselves via the new Member Schools program.



Collaboration with Sister Organization

The National Ayurvedic Medical Association (NAMA) is going through a standards development process. We have much in common and NAMA has generously allowed IAYT and Yoga Alliance (YA) representatives to observe its process. Similarly, representatives from NAMA and the YA attended IAYT's Meeting with Schools.

International Perspectives

We are trying to keep up with and share related developments across the globe. A growing collection of international articles is presented on our website, under Publications/Articles/the Status of Standards for Yoga Therapists Worldwide. Many of the currently posted articles are out of date so updates are welcome.

Next Steps

While the drive and the energy for this work has to come from the schools themselves, IAYT attempts to provide a structure and support the development of a representative and well-informed decision-making process. Next steps are under discussion, but no recommendations, much less any decisions, have been made. **YTT**