



John Weeks addresses Yoga therapist training program directors.

A LANDMARK MEETING WITH YOGA THERAPIST TRAINING PROGRAM DIRECTORS

BY JOHN KEPNER, IAYT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

A classic step in a profession's evolution is for its training schools to come together to develop educational standards and address ongoing common issues. Such a landmark step occurred on the first day of IAYT's recent annual conference in Los Angeles. Over 30 individuals representing 25 training programs came together to identify steps to move our profession forward.

EDUCATORS SAY "EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS" IS THE MOST PRESSING ISSUE FACING OUR FIELD

Before this meeting, a special survey was sent to all of the 23 self-described Yoga therapist training programs we were aware of, including several that were just starting in 2008. This survey provided insight into the current "state of the art" of Yoga therapist training, including their opinions of the most pressing issues facing our field. The top issue, as reported by 14 schools, was "Educational Standards."

By the end of the two-hour meeting, there appeared to be unanimous support for forming a council of schools, and for the educators themselves to develop educational standards. Not surprisingly, the term "standards" stimulates concerns, even fear, in our community, but also hopes and aspirations.

ACCAHC PROVIDES AN EXPERIENCED PERSPECTIVE

To provide an experienced perspective at this meeting, IAYT enlisted the help of John Weeks, executive director of the Academic Consortium for Complementary and Alternative Health Care (ACCAHC). Weeks artfully described the common path for

emerging professions: first an association, then a council of schools, then an accrediting body for schools, and then a credentialing body for practitioners. There are even third-party agencies to accredit both the accrediting agencies and the credentialing agencies. This is not the only path available, but it is indeed the established pattern. It's up to the Yoga therapy field to decide its own path.

Weeks also described the rationale for such a bureaucracy. The most common rationale is to protect the public. What are they "buying" when they seek the services of a Yoga therapist? Richard Miller, an IAYT co-founder and founder of the Center for Timeless Being in Sebastopol, CA, noted that the U.S. Army is asking him this kind of question as they consider his *Yoga nidra* programs for helping returning veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder. "How do we know that what these programs are providing is indeed Yoga?" is one of their pointed questions.

In a mature field, the conventional answer to this question is, "It's from a school that is a member of a council of colleges that has a federally recognized accrediting agency." Whether or not we want to go this whole route is up to us, but that's the point. It's up to the field to develop appropriate educational standards. Weeks said, "The art of standards is to create a tool that actually appreciates your differences while also articulating your commonalities." He also stresses that a key issue for all disciplines is "How do you hold on to your essential nature in this standards process so it doesn't drive the 'juju' out?" Among the answers: It takes steady, hard, and committed work, and it can only be done by the educators themselves. If the field is not ready, it cannot be forced.

After this perspective, the directors broke into small groups to listen to everyone's thoughts on the potential pros and cons of developing standards for Yoga therapy education.

PROS

- Definition and direction for profession and consumers
- Consumer protection
- Discipline protection and improved liability protection
- Push therapist training to next level
- Adding dimensions to programs
- Clarify our relationship to the healthcare system
- Improve our collective visibility in the public eye
- Yoga therapy educators will be in charge of standards
- Reduce confusion to public
- Create standard prerequisites for therapist training
- Improve collective marketing

CONS

- Fear of losing of creativity and intuition in practice
- Fear that the essence of the tradition will be lost
- Fear of entering the medical model
- Fear of losing essence of spirituality
- Adding dimensions to programs
- Structure can bring stagnation
- Excessive bureaucracy
- Homogenization may limit diversity
- Impulse to include all will reduce standards
- Prerequisites may limit students with different backgrounds
- May not be able to agree on standards

NEXT STEPS AND IAYT'S ROLE

By the end of the meeting, there appeared to be unanimous consensus to move forward and start the process. IAYT has committed to providing administrative support the rest of the year, for up to three telephone meetings and, if this group chooses, another face-to-face meeting. They may also hire a facilitator who is a subject-matter expert in the field. This is what the National Ayurvedic Medical Association has done, and IAYT is in close communication with NAMA on their own process. IAYT will communicate progress in this work via *Yoga Therapy in Practice*, IAYT's website, IAYT's new Digital Resources Library (<http://iayt.fmdrl.org>), and at SYTAR 2009 next March.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

IAYT is supporting careful, cautious movement and informed discussion of this important issue for our field. Please note that educational standards for schools are not credentialing requirements for current practitioners, nor is this effort an expression of support for licensing practitioners. IAYT is providing explicit support for our field to develop our own educational standards to support our role as a bridge between Yoga and healthcare.

If you are the director of a therapist training program we are not aware of and you are interested in this process, please let us know at director@iayt.org. We would like to keep all interested directors informed. However, the program director must be an IAYT member and be willing to fill out IAYT's evolving annual survey of Yoga therapist training programs. □

IAYT - DRL

IAYT DIGITAL RESOURCES LIBRARY

Inform yourself and ignite your knowledge of yoga therapy

RESOURCES ON YOGA THERAPY: SEARCH, LEARN, RATE & POST

The IAYT-DRL is an important new tool to enrich your own work. Search among papers and presentations to follow contemporary research, education, and practice in Yoga therapy. Learn from articles, like: "Chronic Pain and Yoga Therapy," "Integrative Restoration," and "Respiratory Physiology Workshop." Rate the material that you read. Post resources of your own (SYTAR presenters and IAYT members only). Using the website is free.

Check it out today! <http://iayt.fmdrl.org>



The IAYT-DRL is brought to you by the International Association of Yoga Therapists with the support of the Society of Teachers of Family Medicine, the Yoga Research and Educational Foundation and the California Yoga Teachers Association