

SYTARReports

Meeting of Schools 2018

By Montserrat G. Mukherjee

As visitors representing a yoga therapy school in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, my partner and I didn't really know what to expect from the IAYT Meeting of Schools (MoS). Expectations always seem to be a cause of *dukkha*—suffering or stress—so we prepared ourselves with soft hearts and open minds.

From the start of the meeting, though, I saw smiling faces, respectful attitudes, and genuine interest for our work, with a constant excitement about the subject of yoga therapy. Everyone clearly shared many of the same objectives and dreams. I looked around and gave a deep sigh of relief.

This report offers an overview of what we learned in those two days, but more importantly it touches on the organic aspects of the meeting, which, it seems to me, are the glue that keeps this community together.

In roundtable discussions that first afternoon, attendees were asked to answer two questions: (1) “What keeps you inspired in the work you do?” and (2) “What, in your opinion, is the future of yoga therapy?” The answers from around the room were so beautiful! Most of us were inspired by our own practices, our students, nature, and loved ones. Many want to see yoga therapy recognized, fully integrated with the medical community, and covered by insurance.

I loved the continuity of events on that first day, too, as we moved on to learning about the basic principles that IAYT represents, such as trust, respect, and inclusivity. Fittingly, IAYT represents certified yoga therapists in 50 countries, with the United States, Canada, Australia, the UK, and India leading the way. Our average age is 53, which makes sense, as therapeutic work calls for experience, life wisdom, and years of training and practice.

Building the Rep

For IAYT and its accreditation programs to embody similar trustworthiness takes time, effort, and the wisdom to look into what could be improved. Part of building mainstream trustworthiness is the certification of yoga therapists and the accreditation of yoga therapy schools. The accreditation team has been working hard to guide programs through this rigorous process. Some parts of this path may be frustrating and seem overly arduous, but it is important to remember that yoga therapy is a self-regulating profession; there needs to be a structure to support and ensure the integrity of the practice.

What I understood early on that first day was that IAYT is a professional organization, but also a human one that leaves space for improvement, personal contact, and creativity. I felt we were off to a good start!

Getting down to Business

Continuous Learning

The approved professional development (APD) program is finally getting off the ground. Although the program will eventually be open to a range of continuing education options for yoga therapists, during pilot testing APD courses will require a specific focus on skills related to yoga therapy application. Now that certification is successfully launched, APDs are a natural progression to help C-IAYTs with continuing education. The certification committee in charge of this process is expecting to start a pilot program this August, with expansion beyond the pilot anticipated by February 2019.



If you already have a course that you would like to put forward as an APD, check the criteria for the pilot program (they're in Member News on page 8). Once approved, you can receive the APD service mark, with website listings and automatic course credits applied to students' IAYT profiles.

Renewals of the C-IAYT credential will start in August 2019—check your iayt.org profile for your own renewal date.

On IAYT's to-do list is the creation of an exam that may eventually be required for certification. There also exists the possibility that this exam could be taken by experienced therapists who missed grandparenting. Exam development would need to be a multiyear

process involving subject-matter experts who could fairly capture all the key elements needed for yoga therapist competency.

More doors are opening, this time regarding licensed healthcare providers (LHCP) and the development of yoga therapy training for them. This brave but necessary move will be explored as continuing education via a 2019 pilot program.

Spreading the Word

The final staff presentation of the evening was by Laurie Hyland Robertson, editor in chief and head of the IAYT communications team, which is focusing on building demand for C-IAYTs, increasing the number of IAYT members, and increasing the value of membership for current members and C-IAYTs.

A growing area of exposure for IAYT is social media, through Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, and Twitter. If you haven't yet connected to IAYT via these social channels, this is the time to do it. Along with additional tools like business-card and referral-pad templates, a new baby has been born this year, one which hopefully will help reach a wider audience and touch the general public: <https://yogatherapy.health>. The website includes links to relevant research and other articles and to a blog worth checking out and—

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why not?—collaborating with. (Yogatherapy.health has its own presence on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, too.)

We talked about what we, as members, program representatives, and yoga therapy professionals, need from the IAYT publications. Ideas discussed included how to offer a more reader-friendly approach to medical and science research. There was also the suggestion of reporting more case studies and real-life yoga therapy stories told by clients themselves. All participants were invited to submit their own cases and client testimonials to IAYT's publications, including the new website.

Career Prospects

To kick off day 2, IAYT executive director John Kepner led a practical panel discussion formed by Diane Finlayson, MA, C-IAYT, NAMA AP; Biz Magarity, C-IAYT, MS, MBA, E-RYT 500, NAMA AYT; and Mary Northey, C-IAYT, E-RYT 500, about the work prospects for yoga therapists. One of the most important aspects of this talk was the highlighting of the many points of entry that exist for yoga therapists wanting to introduce their work in healthcare settings. As part of getting our message out there, we can tap into practical solutions and advice from yoga network platforms and marketing experts. If we wish to work and grow, we need to cultivate our business sense.

The yamas and niyamas embody respectful relationships with ourselves and the world around us, and they can also inspire and serve as rules for how to build our business models. This means creating a community based on collaboration rather than competition. Program directors can encourage this way of thinking among

students by asking, “What can we do to encourage and support those who are coming into this profession to work collaboratively with other professionals?” The panel discussion ended on a high note, with the affirmations that yoga therapy IS a health profession and that yoga therapists are already working in all different fields in private and public health environments.

PechaKucha, the IAYT Way

The origin of *PechaKucha* (literally, “chit-chat”) goes all the way to tech-savvy Tokyo, where this art of concise presentations was created: The idea is to quickly (as in, 20 slides in 20 seconds) present stimulating ideas that provoke discussion. IAYT did its own version, with the MoS having six PechaKucha groups, each lead by a main speaker and one moderator, with discussion limited to 15 minutes. Here are the three that I attended.

Timothy McCall, MD: SNAPS Assessment

McCall's approach was already familiar from my student years in London, so I was really excited to meet him and hear him talk about his SNAPS assessment, which comprises

Structure,
Nervous systems and breath
Ayurveda,
Psychology, and
Spirituality.

We were curious to know if he follows the sequence of SNAPS when doing an assessment. As an experienced yoga therapist, McCall's answer was clear: “It depends.” For instance, some clients might not be ready for spirituality, but you still keep it on your radar because their attitudes might change.

The structure of a human being cannot be truly assessed if we only see movement as combinations of agonists and antagonists, McCall told us, or if we apply a fixed technique for one specific problem. He spoke passionately about “biotensegrity,” and the idea that there is never just one rigid approach. Biotensegrity is based on the principle that everything is interconnected in the body through the essential elements of fascia and the intelligent relationship between movement and pressure, fascia, the internal organs, and the





a place where the heart is and thoughts converge” through daily chanting of the Yoga Sutras in the classic Krishnamacharya tradition. There are sessions on philosophy throughout the whole AVI course, and students are asked to reflect and write essays about some of these philosophical ideas and to use them in their lives. Another differentiation of this program is that the practicum delivery is done on site, which means that the mentors are always present, and each student has the same mentor for 4 years. Students also get to work on their own health conditions, so nourishment of personal work and practice are an essential part of this course.

A Final Om

A beautiful closing focused on unity and diversity seemed totally appropriate for the end of this year’s meeting with its representatives from all over the world. In our journey, we are going back to the origin.

cells; this concept is well worth exploring further for its possible applications in yoga therapy.

Julia Romano: Into the West

Julia Romano is a full-time certified yoga therapist who supervises students in training and works with patients in acute care at Howard County General Hospital as part of the practicum at Maryland University of Integrative Health.

Romano called her work at the hospital a “special experience,” but explained that she doesn’t use the word “yoga” at all. She and her team integrate yoga with allopathic terms that fit smoothly into a Western medical setting. When her patients can barely move and are being treated in a medical environment, Romano said that she cannot turn up dressed in yoga pants and say, “Hi, I’m Julia, and I am a yoga therapist. Would you like to do some pranayama?” She and her students attend doctor’s rounds, and when they meet with patients it is at the bedside, where much of the session is likely to consist of, yes, pranayama.

This acute-care setting is a unique form of training for yoga therapy students, and, of course, there are some strict rules. We talked about how important it is for yoga therapy students to be familiar with medical terms, pathology, and working in a clinical setting if we want to be employed and respected in this environment.

Gary Kraftsow: Therapist’s Mind, Beginner’s Mind

I was interested in hearing about the American Viniyoga Institute’s (AVI) yoga therapy program from its founder and director. When we asked him about the level of his students, Kraftsow was very sure about his reply: “All our students start at the beginning [by] finding

We were invited to unite our efforts to bring yoga therapy into the mainstream so it can reach so many more people.

When my partner and I first arrived at the MoS, we did not expect such unity or diversity. But 2 whole days saw warmth and smiles, yet determination and professional dedication—the perfect balance of softness and strength. **YTT**



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