

WHAT IS YOGA THERAPY? AN IAYT DEFINITION

Yoga therapy is the process of empowering individuals to progress toward improved health and well-being through the application of the philosophy and practice of Yoga.

definition of Yoga therapy. Defining Yoga therapy is an important first step in establishing Yoga therapy as an accepted and respected therapy. As outlined below, this definition will provide a foundation for working together to define what a Yoga therapist is and how a Yoga therapist is educated.

WHY DO WE NEED A DEFINITION?

The association is frequently approached by the media, professionals, and other organizations seeking to better understand and report on our growing profession. Fundamental to such communication is a concise definition. In the past, without such a definition, the quality and accuracy of the definition provided literally depended on who answered the phone.

As a board, we believe that having a well-thought-out and researched definition to provide to the public is an important function of an association. The definition is intended for the public's consumption, including other professions and regulatory groups, and by no means is the only definition of Yoga therapy.

HOW DID WE REACH THIS DEFINITION?

The Board developed the following criteria for a definition of Yoga therapy:

- (1) The definition would be concise and could be understood by people with limited Yoga background.
- (2) The definition would be broad enough to include most facets of Yoga therapy, and to not exclude members.
- (3) The language would be carefully structured to create a wellness model (as opposed to a pathology-based or disease treatment model) definition that would not create legal and regulatory red-flags for the profession.

The IAYT Board began by reviewing a number of definitions in print, including those posted on the IAYT website. The board then undertook a detailed review of the transcripts from the 2007 SYTAR panel discussion on "What is Yoga Therapy?" to see if our proposed definition substantively conflicted with the opinions expressed that day.

The January 2007 Symposium on Yoga Therapy and Research opened with a panel discussion on the question, "What is Yoga therapy?" To introduce this session, IAYT co-founder Richard Miller shared with the audience that this discussion has had over an 18-year history within IAYT—without resolution.

The current Board of Directors decided at its February 2007 meeting that it was time to complete the task of preparing an IAYT

The process was completed at this summer's board meeting, when we arrived at the following definition as having met all of the criteria: Yoga therapy is the process of empowering individuals to progress toward improved health and well-being through the application of the philosophy and practice of Yoga.

WHAT ABOUT OTHER DEFINITIONS?

This definition offers a broad umbrella definition that every school and practitioner can then elaborate on to describe their particular approach to Yoga therapy. The board's hope is that the definition will also extend our professional conversation around what Yoga therapy is—and is not—as outlined below.

HOW WILL THE DEFINITION BE FINALIZED?

The board wants to hear from the membership if this definition provides them with a concise tool for communicating with their local community and consumers. Does this definition satisfy the public's curiosity? Does it open dialogue for you in "elevator" conversations when people ask you what Yoga therapy is in response to learning you are a Yoga therapist? Please submit your feedback to us at definition@iayt.org. You will also have an opportunity to meet with the board members at SYTAR '08. Our intention is for this to be the continuation of long dialogue as we move forward in our mission. We hope to get to meet you there and hear what you do as a Yoga therapist. We want to hear from you!

NEXT ON THE LIST: WHAT IS A YOGA THERAPIST?

The board acknowledges that this definition is broad and does very little to differentiate Yoga therapy from Yoga. In our study of many of the other professions (psychology, massage therapy, physical therapy, medicine, etc.), we observed that such a differentiation is achieved in the development of the profession's scope of practice. Put another way, differentiation occurs by describing the "what" that Yoga therapists provide as Yoga therapy, and how they maintain safety and quality.

SYTAR '08 will focus on discussing and learning the "what" from both the presenters and the participants. Part of this learning process will include a pre-conference session with directors of Yoga therapy programs, along with surveying the participants on what they do as Yoga therapists. The main session presentations will include panel discussions on these issues.

The IAYT Board will continue to collect, consolidate, and describe the results in regular communication with the membership and member Yoga therapy schools. This is an educational process for all of us, and the board has adopted a well-planned process of learning what exactly we are doing in the name of Yoga therapy.

At this time, there is no intention of generating standards or regulations. There is only a disciplined process of serving our membership by deepening our profession's self-knowledge and educating the public about our exciting new profession.

Look for more information this spring after SYTAR '08 in the June YTIP. □

Reported by Matthew J. Taylor, PT, PhD, for the Board of IAYT