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**Responsible Self-Regulation:  
Comments on the Recently Published Yoga Alliance Position on Yoga Therapy**

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We at IAYT were as surprised as everyone else to learn that Yoga Alliance (YA) had taken a formal organizational position on yoga therapy, following the publication of a legal analysis of the practice of yoga therapy in the U.S. that was financed by YA. Upon reflection, however, it makes sense for the YA to distinguish what they do from what IAYT does, since neither YA's standards nor their mission are designed to support yoga therapy as an emerging field distinct from yoga teaching. Yoga therapy is here to stay, however, with widespread and growing acceptance as an adjunctive therapy in an integrative approach to health, so it is timely to more carefully identify the distinguishing characteristics and develop distinct credentials.

Establishing the field of yoga therapy as a recognized profession is IAYT's core mission. Indeed, for over 25 years we have been steadily building many pillars in support of our mission, including creating professional publications, presenting conferences, developing educational standards, and establishing relationships with complementary and integrative health care organizations.<sup>i</sup> Over the last ten years, we have gathered our community together to develop a set of high educational standards for the training of yoga therapists, a rigorous accrediting process to recognize training programs that meet these standards and, a certification process to recognize individual practitioners who meet IAYT's requirements (certification will begin in June 2016). Earlier this year, we circulated a draft Code of Ethics, with well-defined enforcement provisions and a draft Scope of Practice, to our membership for review and comment before final adoption. At the heart of IAYT's efforts to develop high educational standards, as well as effective processes for accrediting educational programs and certifying practitioners, is our goal of creating an integrated structure that allows for *responsible self-regulation of the profession*.

After discussion with our members, our committees, and at IAYT's recent annual board meeting and a community meeting at the Beloved Yoga studio in Reston, VA, we would like offer a few additional comments on the YA position on yoga therapy.

- From IAYT's perspective, yoga therapy is not "diagnosing and treating" health conditions. While it's not easy to summarize a wide range of healing practices in just a few words, we might say yoga therapists "assess and educate" in order to "empower individuals to improve their health and wellbeing through the application of the teachings and practices of yoga".
- IAYT's complete definition is, of course, much more comprehensive than the summary sentence above. Our definition was first published in 2012 in conjunction with our educational standards; for more information, refer to the article "What is Yoga Therapy, an IAYT Definition" in the Resources section of the IAYT website.
  - The YA-financed legal analysis of yoga therapy practice in the U.S. cited as IAYT's definition of yoga therapy a single sentence we published back in 2007.
  - Similarly, that analysis quotes and criticizes a very old article entitled "Current Illustrative Standards for Yoga Therapists" written in 2003. That is a far cry from our

actual and extensive “Educational Standards for the Training of Yoga Therapists” published in 2012 and our first draft Scope of Practice just published this year.

- The YA financed legal analysis seems to lack awareness of the widespread acceptance of yoga therapy and IAYT’s comprehensive efforts towards responsible self-regulation. It also lacks awareness of the normal development sequence for emerging healthcare professions and is thus *unduly alarmist* about what is actually a normal evolutionary process found in any emerging profession.
- For those of you who are interested in an extensive review of the YA-financed legal analysis and a different perspective on the unregulated practice of yoga therapy, see the following document on the IAYT website: “Comments regarding the Legal Risk of Unregulated Yoga Therapy”, by Daniel Seitz, JD, EdD.
- The language requirements of the new YA policies initially appeared confusing and disruptive to those who provide both yoga therapy and yoga teaching. We are now observing new language emerging, however, which seems to comply with both the letter of the YA requirements and the spirit and substance of their yoga therapy teachings.

IAYT is concerned that the YA position could create a divide in the yoga world and a communications gap between two organizations that ideally would have good lines of communication and offer each other mutual support. Indeed, good communication and mutual support with the YA and our other sister association in the U.S., the National Ayurvedic Medical Association, has been IAYT’s long established policy. We are heartened, then, by the fact that Yoga Alliance recently reached out to us to communicate about the issues above, and we look forward to continuing such communication in order to better serve the broad yoga tradition, our overlapping membership and especially the millions of individuals practicing yoga for health, healing and spiritual support.

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<sup>i</sup> For example, IAYT recently visited the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, the Maryland University for Integrative Health and the Casey Health Institute, all leading institutions for yoga therapy research, graduate education and the integration of yoga therapy into clinical practice, respectively. Principals from all three organizations will be presenting at SYTAR 2016.