

# Yoga Therapy in Practice and Methodology

## The Path from Yoga Therapy in a Medical School to a School of Yoga Therapy in an Integrative Medicine Department

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*Acknowledgement of support: Lisa MacLean, MD, Gail Elliott-Patricolo, Beth Stallman, MD, Josh McKamie, MD*

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### Abstract

We describe how yoga therapy was established within a medical school. Additionally, this paper outlines the development of a yoga therapy position as well as the implementation of a school of yoga therapy in a university-based teaching hospital.

### Introduction

Yoga therapy programs are increasingly visible in healthcare environments. These programs generally include professional interactions with universities, hospitals, and medical schools. As such, existing yoga therapy programs, for the most part, represent leadership in the development of hospital-based yoga therapy courses and research collaborations.

The purpose of this paper is to describe pathways towards (1) a co-curricular program in a medical school providing instruction in the clinical applications of yoga therapy. The process describes how a medical student contingent motivated a co-curricular for-credit program offering instruction in selected clinical applications of yoga therapy and (2) incorporated yoga therapy as part of hospital-based patient care. The medical school co-curricular program planted interest and provided the impetus towards the installation of yoga therapy within a hospital environment. The process describes a reproducible format intersecting faculty, students, and a yoga therapy certification program within a large hospital. Combined, this provides the platform for (3) the formation of a school for yoga therapy in compliance with the IAYT accreditation standards at the same institution.

Students of yoga therapy as well as patients inclined to participate in yoga and experiencing hesitancy to participate in a public group setting will increasingly benefit by expanded options of yoga therapy within a clinically based healing system. It is towards this aim that this article will be the frontrunner of many more diligent, innovative, credible, and sustainable developments as the field moves forward.

### Methods

#### 1. Yoga therapy as a co-curricular program in a medical school

In 2011, a core group of first- and second-year medical school students attending the Wayne State University School of Medicine, Detroit, MI (WSU SOM) petitioned for the inclusion of yoga therapy to supplement existing medical school curriculum. WSU SOM is currently the largest medical school in the US with over 300 medical students graduating each year. The student petition was preceded by a twice a week hourlong yoga practice offered to medical students and faculty and sponsored by the American Medical Student Association (Figure 1).



**Figure 1. WSU SOM weekly yoga class for students and faculty.**

After nearly two years of meetings with medical school administrators, the for-credit co-curricular yoga therapy program was approved. The program consisted of a combination of didactic lectures and clinical field experience. WSU SOM contacted one of the authors (VZ) to recruit teaching faculty and to design the didactic content. Topics for each session were proposed by the medical students. A multidisciplinary team of yoga therapists and clinicians developed the yoga therapy co-curricular lecture series. Topics and presenters' credentials are summarized in Tables 1 and 2. Student requirements to participate in the program were substantiation of current full-time enrollment in the Wayne State University School of Medicine and compliance with the co-curricular program guidelines, including successful attendance for all didactic lectures in the series and documented participation in the clinical shadowing experience. Following the completion of the didactic lecture series, students were required to participate in clinical shadowing with their choice of presenters for a total of 10 documented clinical hours (Figure 2). Medical school students were able to follow the same patient for the entire 10-hour shadowing requirement. Students also could opt for diversifying their shadowing experience based on their interest and/or schedule. The program was offered during the 2013-14 and 2014-15 academic years. WSU SOM provided the required facility (lecture/practice room with AV) on the medical school campus. Financial compensation was not offered to the teaching faculty. It was determined by the administrative office of co-curricular affairs that there would be a maximum enrollment of 16 students for the program each year. Within the first two hours of online registration for each year the program reached capacity and enrollment was closed. WSU SOM students who wished to audit the program were permitted to do so. WSU SOM faculty were invit-



**Figure 2. WSU SOM didactic lecture co-curricular yoga therapy program.**

ed to attend sessions of interest and frequently participated as attendees.

The program was popular and well accepted by the medical students as reflected by program evaluations submitted by students following the completion of the didactic sessions. Evaluations are summarized in Appendix B for both academic years. Qualitative feedback from the students indicated favorable experiences that were educationally valuable as exposure to yoga therapy as a clinical healing option. It is hoped that familiarity with the clinical applications of yoga therapy allow increasing awareness towards incorporating related programs into medical school environments as well as the spectrum of related healthcare professions.

Session	Topic	Credentials
Session #1	Restorative yoga therapy	PhD, E-RYT 500
Session #2	Yoga therapy to reverse the effects of stress	MD
Session #3	Yoga therapy to reverse the effects of addictive behaviors	MD
Session #4	Yoga therapy to reverse the effects of back pain	DC, RYT 500
Session #5	Yoga therapy for people with cancer	PhD
Session #6	Yoga therapy as self-care for healers	E-RYT 500

**Table 1. WSU SOM co-curricular yoga therapy program 2013/2014.**

Session	Topic	Credentials
Session #1	Overview of yoga past, present, and future, including safe practices in yoga	PhD
Session #2	Yoga for special patient populations: geriatric, pediatrics	E-RYT 500
Session #3	Yoga for weight loss and fitness	RYT 500
Session #4	Yoga for people with knee problems	E-RYT 500

**Table 2. WSU SOM co-curricular yoga therapy program 2014/2015.**

**2. Incorporating yoga therapy into a hospital department**

It is of interest to note that the steps that led to the inclusion of an on-staff yoga therapist, as well as a school for yoga therapy housed within the Department of Integrative Medicine of a major hospital, is a continuation of the process described above.

Clinical mentorship by the faculty of the co-curricular medical school program stimulated an interesting opportunity for further collaboration. Faculty presenters shared information about the program with their respective peers. Faculty and like-minded area professionals attended informal dinner meetings nicknamed “some enlightened evenings” in order to develop a supporting and inspirational base for expanding educational/professional interests. Several of the attendees offered yoga therapy as part of their clinical expertise. WSU SOM students were invited to contribute thoughts and offer direction. One of the authors (MA), the newly appointed Medical Director of Integrative Medicine (IM) at Beaumont Health, was involved in these conversations. Discussions and negotiations with Beaumont Health administration led to the inclusion of yoga therapy within the Department of Integrative Medicine. In 2014, author VZ was hired as the on-staff yoga therapist and a clinical schedule was implemented. A patient intake form—compatible with the hospital’s electronic health record system, patient treatment plan, and exit strategy documentation—was put in use with the first patient seen. Currently, four patients are scheduled once a week at two Beaumont Health campus locations. Each patient session is 60 minutes at an out-of-pocket cost of \$65. Patients are limited to four total

sessions, thus emphasizing self-care management for wellbeing. Currently, the majority of patients are referred from the medical practices within the department of IM. An educational outreach strategy is in place to attract patients from various clinical departments of this large 3,300-bed health system. To date, 32 patients have been seen for a variety of indications summarized in Table 3. There is ongoing interest from various clinical departments to conduct research in yoga therapy in collaboration with the IM. Up to now, exploratory steps in that direction have been conducted with the departments of pediatrics and urology.

In addition to yoga therapy, Beaumont Health Integrative Medicine services currently include allopathic physician consult, acupuncture, clinical massage, guided imagery, naturopathic medicine, Reiki, and nutrition services.

Reasons for visit-Indications	Frequency
Abdominal pain	3
Anorexia	1
Anxiety/stress	20
Chest pain/atypical	3
Depression	1
Fatigue	5
Fibromyalgia	2
Hip pain	4
Hypertension	1
Hypothyroid	2
Knee/leg pain	5
Low back pain	6
Lumbar stenosis	1
Migraines	3
Mononucleosis	1
Neuropathy/hands, feet	1
Pelvic pain/bilateral ovarian cyst	1
Pelvic pain/generalized	2
Pelvic pain/hysterectomy	1
Osteoarthritis	1
Osteoporosis/neck and spine	2
Post-surgery recovery/cancer	4
Shortness of breath	1
Shoulder/neck pain	17
Urinary retention	2
Weight loss	1

**Table 3. Referral indications for yoga therapy.**

### 3. Hospital-based school of yoga therapy

In 2014, one of the authors (VZ) began a three-year yoga therapy program compliant with Yoga Alliance and IAYT standards (application for accreditation with IAYT is in process as of publication date). The faculty is composed of medical doctors, PhDs, NDs, and E-RYT-500s. Initially, the program was located in a sub-leased psychologist's office. With 20 students enrolled, the program is held on Saturday and Sunday once a month. The prerequisite for acceptance to the program is a RYT 200 credential, submission of an extensive application form consisting of 25 questions related to the applicant's yoga experiences, an application processing fee, and an interview with the program director.

In January of 2015, Beaumont Health approached VZ, who was already on staff as a yoga therapist, about transferring the school to the hospital environment. In May 2015, the first session was conducted as the newly formed Beaumont School of Yoga Therapy. The fact that the school is now part of a university-based teaching hospital leads to educational expansion opportunities including a teaching faculty drawn from numerous clinical departments. Additional benefits include future clinical rotations, yoga therapy potentially delivered to inpatients, interdisciplinary didactics for medical and yoga therapy students, and the potential for research and employment opportunities within the hospital system. It is expected that the combined benefits will offer increasing firsthand familiarity in integrating yoga therapy techniques and allopathic healing systems. In doing so, fluency can be established that can provide initiatives for furthering communication and collaboration in

clinical practices and research. For the yoga therapist, interacting clinically encourages respect for and appreciation of the allopathic parameters, protocols, and terminology specific to the clinical environments with which yoga therapy can be effectively associated.

### Conclusions

This paper describes inclusion of medical school instruction in clinical applications of yoga therapy that was motivated by the grassroots interest of medical school students. It further describes how the program of instruction in a medical school went on to generate community interest among allopathically trained professionals who have cultivated expertise in integrative healing. In our experience, we recognize that community interest is at the core of ongoing educational, research, and clinical opportunities. It will be interesting to note how the experience of establishing a school for yoga therapy within a hospital department will be reproduced and elaborated upon in the future.

Based on our experience, it can be anticipated that continued benchmarking along the path of yoga therapy will lead to more medical school instruction and yoga therapy schools embedded in teaching hospitals and hospital departments. As we have shown in this paper, that path may soon become a well-paved, well-recognized thoroughfare in the landscape of healthcare and wellbeing.

We greatly acknowledge and salute the efforts of existing yoga therapy programs made credible by the substantiating rigor set by the International Association of Yoga Therapists.

## Appendix A

### A Partial List of Internet Links to Establish University and Hospital-Based Yoga Therapy Programs

- Maryland University of Integrative Health's Master of Science in Yoga Therapy  
[www.muih.edu/academics/masters-degrees/master-yoga-therapy](http://www.muih.edu/academics/masters-degrees/master-yoga-therapy)
- University of Maryland Center for Integrative Medicine's Healing Pathways Yoga Teacher Trainings at the RYS 200 and 500 levels  
[www.compmed.umm.edu/yoga\\_training.asp](http://www.compmed.umm.edu/yoga_training.asp)
- Loyola University, Los Angeles offers Yoga Therapy RX  
[academics.lmu.edu/extension/programs](http://academics.lmu.edu/extension/programs)
- The Integrative Yoga Therapy Program at Mount Sinai Beth Israel  
[www.wehealny.org/services/bi\\_im/ICS.html](http://www.wehealny.org/services/bi_im/ICS.html)
- Enrichment programs of Boston University School of Medicine offers free-time elective classes in yoga  
[www.bumc.bu.edu/enrichment/fte/#EmbHealth](http://www.bumc.bu.edu/enrichment/fte/#EmbHealth)
- Yoga Therapy at Children's Hospital Colorado  
[www.childrenscolorado.org/departments/psych/programs/creative-arts-therapy/yoga-therapy](http://www.childrenscolorado.org/departments/psych/programs/creative-arts-therapy/yoga-therapy)
- University Hospitals Connor Integrative Health Network, Cleveland, Ohio  
[www.uhconnorintegrativehealth.org/services/yoga-therapy](http://www.uhconnorintegrativehealth.org/services/yoga-therapy)
- University of California Medical Center in San Francisco  
[www.ucsfhealth.org/search/results.html?cx=002394078663376459742%3A8lhwhylhedgg&cof=FORID%3A10&cie=UTF-8&q=yoga&csa.x=29&csa.y=10](http://www.ucsfhealth.org/search/results.html?cx=002394078663376459742%3A8lhwhylhedgg&cof=FORID%3A10&cie=UTF-8&q=yoga&csa.x=29&csa.y=10)
- Integrative Medicine Program at the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, Texas  
[explore.mdanderson.org/search?site=my\\_collection&client=my\\_collection&output=xml\\_no\\_dtd&proxystylesheet=my\\_collection&q=yoga](http://explore.mdanderson.org/search?site=my_collection&client=my_collection&output=xml_no_dtd&proxystylesheet=my_collection&q=yoga)
- St Jude's Children Research Center Departments of Clinical Nutrition and Rehabilitation Services  
[www.newswise.com/articles/st-jude-children-s-research-hospital-combines-yoga-and-nutrition-in-program-designed-to-complement-cancer-therapy](http://www.newswise.com/articles/st-jude-children-s-research-hospital-combines-yoga-and-nutrition-in-program-designed-to-complement-cancer-therapy)
- The Cleveland Clinic  
[www.clevelandclinic.org](http://www.clevelandclinic.org)
- The University of Michigan  
[www.uofmhealth.org/news/0808prenatalyoga](http://www.uofmhealth.org/news/0808prenatalyoga)
- Duke Integrative Medicine  
[www.dukeintegrativemedicine.org](http://www.dukeintegrativemedicine.org)
- Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C.  
[www.wrnmmc.capmed.mil/SitePages/home.aspx](http://www.wrnmmc.capmed.mil/SitePages/home.aspx)
- Harvard Medical School in Mind Body Medicine elective course  
[www.medcatalog.harvard.edu/coursedetails.aspx?id=18242](http://www.medcatalog.harvard.edu/coursedetails.aspx?id=18242)

## Appendix B

### WSU SOM CO-Curricular Program Student Evaluation Responses

Indicated satisfaction with the dates, time of day, and location: 100%

Information received might be helpful regarding your own health and wellness: 100%

Information received might be helpful in future clinical applications: 87%

Comments and suggestions regarding the value of this program entered by the students:

- \* *Very informative and thought provoking.*
- \* *Very interesting! However, I wish the presenters further along in the program know what previous presenters talked about so there is less overlap.*
- \* *I liked the seminars.*
- \* *I enjoyed the seminars and have already started shadowing the presenters, which I'm also enjoying!*
- \* *I thought this series did a good job of introducing students into yoga as a therapeutic measure. Also, although it might be considered boring, I think it is important for presenters to present scientific data as we are in medical school and will be using evidence-based medicine.*
- \* *The topics were very interesting and pertained well, especially to us as medical students (i.e., stress, back pain, restorative).*
- \* *The seminar series provided a nice variety of topics. I definitely appreciated the differences in perspective and applications using yoga as a healing modality. My favorite presentation was H.R.MD's talk on using yoga to lower stress. In presentation style, and I thought that his talk was particularly convincing. I also thought that the mindfulness presentation was a good topic and appropriate for the seminar series.*
- \* *I think all the topics presented are relevant to the practice of medicine.*
- \* *Interesting! But I wish there was more hands-on or small changes we could teach to our patients in clinic.*
- \* *Using yoga therapy for stress relief and substance abuse therapy were my favorites. They opened my eyes to completely new ways to use the practice of yoga.*
- \* *I enjoyed most of the presentations, but some of them were pretty off-topic and not applicable to our purposes. I appreciated the demonstrations, and I'd like to see more scientific cases/papers/studies presented instead of them all just listed as references at the end of a talk. About half of the presenters were really excellent, especially the MD presenters. I learned a lot from them and found real perspective.*
- \* *Maybe more patients to elaborate on how yoga has helped them through their illness.*
- \* *Try to do a little yoga with the students.*
- \* *It would be nice if we could start doing the clinical portion while the seminars are happening, at least with the people presented. That way, we have a fresh idea of what was talked about during the seminar.*
- \* *Yoga and anxiety/depression/psychiatric conditions. It'd be nice to have sheet of paper with suggested positions for the medical conditions presented.*
- \* *Healing and yoga—perhaps bring in patient to talk about their own yoga therapy experience.*
- \* *It would have been nice to have a topic about where students could go to get certified in certain modalities, where to go to learn more information, etc. Essentially how students can become a CAM practitioner.*
- \* *I think it would be very interesting to have dedicated seminars on how yoga affects cognition and memory. While it was mentioned in a few of the seminars we had, it would be great to see it as a free-standing topic in the future with more discussion.*
- \* *I would like to see one or two presentations on the potential harm or risk for injury that comes with yoga. I think that would provide an appropriate balance to the seminar series.*
- \* *I think the seminars could be improved if it encouraged more student interaction and also included more demonstrations on yoga techniques and practices.*
- \* *I think making the information more useful and applicable would be helpful verses the different practitioners' research and personal interests.*
- \* *Basic yoga as a first seminar. I don't practice yoga and would have liked an intro.*
- \* *Yoga for certain patient populations with knee problems, geriatric patients, pediatrics, etc.*
- \* *I thought the topics were good but wish there would have been an informational or introductory session explaining what yoga is, where it comes from, the history, different kinds of practices, and also the regulations. A student brought up the question about certification and regulation of CAM therapies and I think it definitely needs to be addressed. "Introduction to Yoga and Weight Loss," "Yoga for Health Maintenance," "Bad Yoga," or "Yoga Certification," so something that has to do with yoga practitioners and the care they deliver.*
- \* *Loved it!*
- \* *I wish that we could pick between allocating hours for clinic or outreach.*
- \* *I really enjoyed participating in the seminars and I am looking forward to the clinical component. I received a great introduction to yoga, which I don't think I could have received elsewhere. I think the topic of yoga is relevant to a number of areas of medicine, and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to participate.*
- \* *I found it extremely frustrating that the 10 clinical hours were not mentioned till the end that requirements transport before signing up. [Note: this is an administrative function.]*
- \* *Yes, I think this program needs to continue. I was very pleased to see this CAM integrated in HUMED, and hope to see it continue because I think this is becoming a major part of our medical reality, whether I use it or not, and I need to be informed and have opportunities to explore alternative healing and maintenance modalities. One day, this can be integrated into the regular curriculum and be made available to more students. I think there is a lot of interest and more students should be allowed to participate.*