

## Integrating yoga in health professional education: The SBV experience

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### Introduction

Medicine has been regarded as a noble profession since time immemorial and its practitioners equated with the divine by ill and needy.<sup>(1)</sup> Divine qualities expected in a medical practitioner include wisdom, competence, humility, magnanimity, empathy, selfless service and care. A compassionate heart, a listening ear coupled with a warm caring hand is known to make all the difference between a successful or not so successful return to health for many.

In recent times however this image of the medical profession has suffered badly through many scandals and news reports highlighting the lack of humanistic values in medical professionals. Modern medicine has moved from being an art (with a heart) to a science (with a brain) and now sadly to being a mere business with neither. It is bemoaned commonly that instead of treating the individual who has the disease we have moved on to treating the disease and now to even only treating the medical reports.<sup>(2)</sup>

The Government of India through the Ministry of AYUSH is strongly propagating the integration of Yoga in the health professional education and Sri Balaji Vidyapeeth (SBV), a deemed-to-be university in South India has been in the forefront of this integration of ancient healing wisdom with modern scientific medicine.<sup>(3)</sup> SBV was awarded the coveted "A" Grade by NAAC in 2015 and found place in the top 100 universities of India in the NIRF 2016 and 2017 ranking.

### About CYTER

The Centre for Yoga Therapy, Education and Research (CYTER) has been functioning at MGMC&RI since 2010 and more than 36000 participants have benefited from the Yoga and Yogatherapy sessions held in its premises.<sup>(4)</sup> All Master Health Checkups of the Corporate Health Services wing have Yoga consultation and Yoga therapy is often offered for in-patients in many of the wards themselves. More than a dozen research projects have been completed with another dozen ongoing with a high impact academic publication of 61 papers, five compilations and 21 abstracts published till date. This 'one-of-its-kind' centre functions under the auspices of the Deanery of Allied Health Sciences and is guided by its dean, Prof N Ananthkrishnan and its founding director Prof Madanmohan who is one of the first medical professionals to attempt the symbiotic integration of Yoga in the medical curriculum and had

to this purpose organized a National Workshop on Introducing Yoga in Medical Curriculum at JIPMER, Pondicherry in March 2009.<sup>(5,6)</sup>

### National Seminar on "Integrating Yoga in Health Professions Education"

A National Seminar was organized by CYTER and Department of Physiology on "Integrating Yoga in Health Professions Education" at MGMC & RI on 21 June 2016.<sup>(7)</sup> National experts in medical, dental and nursing education as well as Yoga and allied experts participated in the deliberations that unanimously adopted the following recommendations:<sup>(8)</sup>

1. There was a consensus that Yoga deserves a prominent place in the curriculum of all health professionals education, though further deliberations may be needed to work out the modalities of how, when and by whom it should be taught and assessed.
2. From the point of view of not burdening the existing curriculum which is already top-heavy, attempts may be made to integrate the teaching of Yoga at appropriate places in the curriculum such as foundation courses, basic sciences particularly physiology, community medicine and clinical disciplines such as physiotherapy where therapeutic benefits can be integrated.
3. Integration of Yoga studies requires much effort from the faculty across various disciplines which rest on training and preparation of faculty in the form of Faculty Development Programs. The existing mechanisms of faculty development should address and incorporate this issue before implementing Yoga training in a structured manner.
4. The efforts to implement Yoga require a concerted and coordinated effort in the form of inter-professional education. This requires effective leadership and teamwork from the faculty across various disciplines, backed by curricular changes supported by the respective councils (MCI, DCI, NCI).
5. The Seminar laid special emphasis on the fact that Yoga is a holistic approach. As such, it should encompass the whole gamut of lifelong education, starting from early school stage extended up to higher education and workplaces to embrace the entire life span.
6. The existing Centers of Yoga, especially CYTER with help from other Centers in India should take lead in initiating the process of Training of

Trainers (ToT) in organizing Faculty Development Programs with support from Government and NGOs, to speed up the process of implementation.

7. It was recommended and concluded that CYTER be made a “nodal centre” to lead in activities pertaining to Health Professions Education and necessary steps betaken by the concerned authorities.

### Yoga in MBBS curriculum

For the past two years (2015 and 2016) all 1<sup>st</sup> MBBS students have received exposure to Yoga during their 10 day orientation program at the Mahatma Gandhi Medical College and Research Institute. During these daily sessions, they received lectures detailing the foundations of the philosophy and psychology of Yoga as well as science behind the effects of Yoga. They also received practical training in various techniques aimed at stress management including Jathis, Kriyas, Asanas, Pranayamas and contemplative relaxation practices. These lectures and practice sessions were also conducted for the 1<sup>st</sup> MBBS students of Sri Satya Sai Medical College and Research Institute through an intensive one day programme. Feedback from both years showed excellent response to the Yoga lectures and practical sessions with more than 80% rating it as excellent and another 18% as very good. Students reported that the Yoga sessions had helped them adjust to the college life better and also that the stress management techniques enhanced their ability to do well in curricular and extracurricular activities. They requested for more such sessions on a regular weekly or biweekly basis. As a result, MBBS students are currently receiving Yoga classes for one hour twice a month on alternate Saturdays. Many of them are attending the regular practical sessions conducted in the evenings at CYTER for the faculty, staff and students of SBV. More than 4000 participants have benefited from these free sessions conducted twice daily from 6-7am and 4.30 to 5.30pm since September 2015.<sup>(9)</sup>

From 2014 onwards 1<sup>st</sup> MBBS students were also given a series of lectures on the Yogic aspects of lifestyle as well as physiological aspects of Yogapractices such as Asana, Pranayama and therapeutic potential of Yoga.<sup>(10,11)</sup> These lectures and lecture-demonstrations took place during physiology hours of the timetable under guidance of Prof Madanmohan. A CME was also organized at SSMC&RI with departments of physiology, anatomy and biochemistry collaborating so that all these topics were covered for the students by the CYTER team in a single day. Three of the students have also taken up ICMR student research projects on Yoga in the past year.

In order to facilitate a general awareness about Yoga and its role in health and disease amongst students and health professionals of SBV and other institutions, CYTER in collaboration with Department

of Physiology organized national level CMEs, seminars and workshops in the past four years. These include the ones on “Yoga and Lifestyle Disorders” in 2013, “Sleep, Consciousness and Meditation: Neurological Correlates” in 2014,<sup>(12)</sup> “Therapeutic Potential of Yoga” in 2015<sup>(13)</sup> as well as an International symposium on Yoga and Wellbeing in 2016. As a result of these initiatives two MD dissertations have been taken up on Yoga as adjuvant therapy in General Medicine and Psychiatry.

International Day of Yoga was celebrated in a grand manner in 2015 and 2016 at SBV with multifaceted events involving faculty, staff and students of SBV as well as the general public. As per directives of the UGC, the SBV Yoga Fest 2016 was organized by CYTER in May 2016 with poster, essay, quiz and cultural events to enhance awareness of Yoga.<sup>(4,14)</sup> Demonstrations of the Common Yoga Protocol devised by the Ministry of AYUSH as well as lecture-demonstrations by experts were organized to give a holistic perspective of the Yoga to all students. This was further facilitated by enthusiastic support of Dean and Vice Principals of MGMC&RI. Speaking on the occasion, Prof KR Sethuraman, Vice Chancellor of SBV expressed the need for health professionals to look towards salutogenesis, an understanding of the internal and external factors that induce health rather than mechanically focusing on pathogenesis of disease.<sup>(14,15)</sup> “Human beings are flawed as they are always susceptible to disease. Yet, some stay healthy even in the worst of conditions. This is because they have a sense of coherence within themselves, find meaning in their lives and hence are more at ease with their lives” said he. All the events were geared towards giving the students a view of Yoga as an ancient system that enables one to create a positive environment both within oneself as well as in the external environment. Such harmonious and dynamic balance between both worlds educates the manifestation of health and wellbeing.

### Yoga in BDS curriculum

Since 2015 all 1<sup>st</sup> BDS students have received exposure to Yoga during their orientation program at the Indira Gandhi Institute of Dental Sciences (IGIDS). They were given lectures on the philosophy and psychology of Yoga as well as science behind the effects of Yoga. They also received practical training in stress management techniques such as Jathis, Kriyas, Asanas, Pranayamas and contemplative relaxation practices. Feedback from both years showed excellent response to the Yoga lectures and practical sessions. As a result, BDS students are receiving two hours of Yoga training at CYTER twice a month on alternate Thursdays. Many of them have also continued to attend the regular practical sessions conducted in the evenings at CYTER. Thanks to the support of the Principal and Vice Principal as well as faculty members, students of

IGIDS also participated enthusiastically in the SBV Yoga Fest 2016 as well as International Day of Yoga celebrations thus giving them an opportunity to experience the wholesome nature of Yoga.<sup>(8,14)</sup> The interest generated at IGIDS and the support from the faculty have also resulted in an MDS dissertation being taken up on Yoga in autism spectrum disorder and oral hygiene.

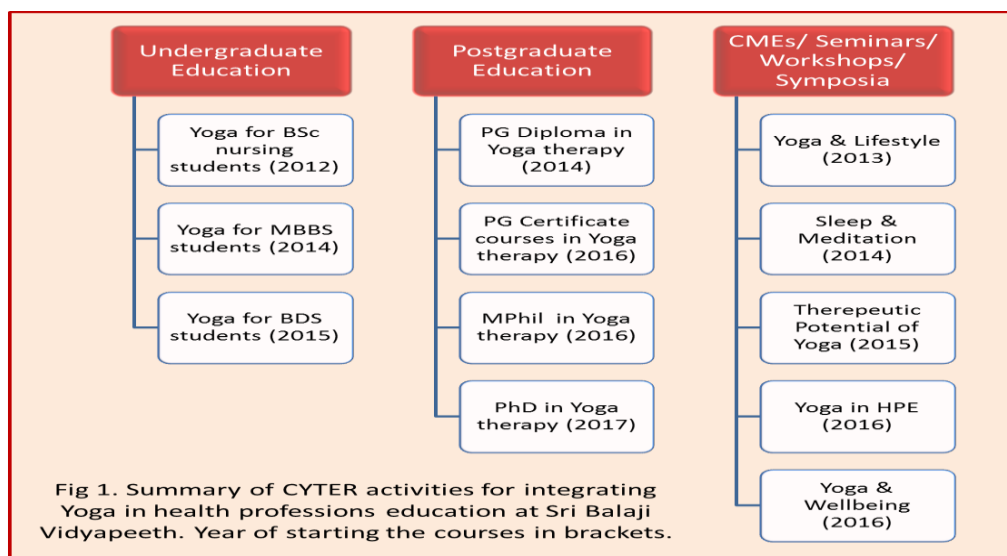
### Yoga in BSc Nursing curriculum

The authorities of Kasturba Gandhi Nursing College were amongst the first to understand the value of Yoga and started giving Yoga training to students of their college right from 2012. Initially it was given as an optional extracurricular activity and later became a co-curricular activity. A study done with 60 students who received Yoga training twice weekly for 6 months showed significant beneficial changes in quality of life indices as well as hematological and biochemical parameters and these changes correlated positively with attendance.<sup>(16)</sup> On the basis of this study it was recommended that Yoga be made an integral part of medical and paramedical collegiate education.<sup>(17)</sup> All nursing students took part enthusiastically in the first and second International Day of Yoga celebrations in 2015 and 2016 and also bagged majority of prizes in the events held during the SBV Yoga Fest 2016.<sup>(8,14)</sup>

The avant-apres (pre-post) comparison elicited from the students by our Vice-Chancellor after their training in January to March 2015 showed how Yoga has transformed their personalities as well their sense of wellness. Initial feelings expressed as heavy, inability, breathlessness, anxious, hesitant and scattered transformed through Yoga into feelings of being capable, respected, contentment, confident, composed, happy and peaceful.

Based on positive changes experienced and expressed by students, teachers and administrators, it was proposed to include Yoga officially as a part of the nursing curriculum and the first meeting of the duly constituted Board of Studies was held on 20 July 2016. The board approved inclusion of Yoga in nursing curriculum through a specialized course namely "Foundation in Yoga Therapy". It was decided that lectures and training would be given during hours of co-curricular activities for 1st year BSc (N) while it would be under Medical Surgical Nursing I & II subject hours during 2nd and 3rd year BSc (N). A total of 45 hours were earmarked for the 1<sup>st</sup> year, 30 hours for the 2<sup>nd</sup> year and 15 hours during the 3<sup>rd</sup> year thus making up a total of 90 hours during the entire BSc (N) course. The training commenced in August 2016 and the first 45 hours have been completed. 2<sup>nd</sup> year students are regularly posted to CYTER for a full week on rotational basis and this has enabled them to receive comprehensive training and get hands-on experience in how Yoga therapy is imparted for the patients through CYTER.

To further enhance this integrative process, the theme chosen for 6<sup>th</sup> Foundation Day celebrations of CYTER on 2 November 2016 was "Introducing Yoga in Nursing Education".<sup>(18)</sup> Dr K Renuka, Dean Nursing Faculty and Principal KGNC gave the thematic address highlighting innovations in nursing curriculum at Sri Balaji Vidyapeeth that for the first time anywhere included Yoga Therapy as a subject in the BSc Nursing curriculum. Presiding over the event, Prof KR Sethuraman, VC of SBV reminded nursing students of their vital role in healthcare as the primary caregivers for patients and stressed the importance of Yoga in their personal and professional life.



## Conclusion

Modern medical advancements provide the rationale for integration of various traditional healing techniques like Yoga, Naturopathy, Ayurveda, Siddha and Music to promote health, healing and longevity.<sup>(19,20)</sup> Government of India is currently promoting indigenous systems of health in an active manner through Ministry of AYUSH. The limitations of modern medicine in managing stress induced psychosomatic, chronic illnesses is the strength of these traditional healing systems and hence a holistic integration of both systems enables best quality of patient care. It is imperative that advances in medicine include the holistic approach of Yoga to face the current challenges in health care. The antiquity of Yoga must be united with the innovations of modern medicine to improve quality of life throughout the world. No wonder that Dr. Dean Ornish, the eminent American doctor who has shown that Yogic lifestyle can reverse heart disease says, “Yoga is a system of perfect tools for achieving union as well as healing”.<sup>(19,20)</sup>

For probably the first time anywhere in the world, all medical, dental and nursing students of a medical university are receiving regular training in Yoga. This is happening at Sri Balaji Vidyapeeth where all students of SBV's constituent colleges are getting exposed to the integrative potential of Yoga with the modern healthcare system.

We can proudly state that it is only in the supportive and innovative milieu of Sri Balaji Vidyapeeth, Pondicherry, India that the holistic art and science of Yoga, our cultural heritage, has been able to reach both the classes and the masses of our society optimally, effectively and holistically.

## Acknowledgements

Support of the benevolent management and visionary administrators of Sri Balaji Vidyapeeth University who setup the CYTER in 2010 is gratefully acknowledged. Heartfelt gratitude is offered to our Hon'ble Chairman & Chancellor, Vice-chancellor, Dean of Research & Allied Health Sciences and Registrar SBV for their constant support and encouragement. The CYTER team is ably guided by Prof. Madanmohan, Founder Director CYTER and blessed by Ammaji Yogacharini Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani, Director ICYER. Integration of Yoga in medical, dental and nursing curriculum was possible with the support of the respective faculty Deans and Vice-Principals of the constituent colleges as well as faculty of SBV AHEAD. The energy of CYTER activities stems from the efforts of our Deputy Director Dr. Meena Ramanathan who has nurtured CYTER through her motherly affection right from the beginning. The entire past and present CYTER team deserves a special word of appreciation for their tireless efforts in motivating our students as well as for

conducting the practical sessions in an admirable manner.

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