

MARYLAND UNIVERSITY OF INTEGRATIVE HEALTH



Function over form: This is the theoretical and practical underpinning of the MUIH's approach to yoga therapy. The university's Master of Science in Yoga Therapy degree program attracts

practitioners across lineages, and this is one of its greatest strengths, according to director Diane Finlayson: "From YogaFit to Holy Yoga . . . , by bringing all of these people together, we can see a bigger picture than we might if we stayed in our own groove."

Students are first introduced to the *panchamaya kosha* (five sheaths) model, which opens multiple possible doorways to healing. As this theoretical foundation is laid, students hone a range of tools to assess and treat each kosha. Because the program values the function of these tools over the specific forms its practitioners employ, students forge a fundamentally client-centered approach. "This is what separates us from Western medicine," said Finlayson. Whereas an allopathic approach generally employs a specific set of assessments no matter the patient, MUIH graduates learn to make their assessments based on the presentation of each client, and in doing so they are able to dial right into each client's need.

While the first year of the program is dedicated to classroom training, the second focuses largely on a practicum experience during which students engage with clients from all walks of life presenting with conditions across the koshas. The university's onsite student teaching clinic hosts students from all of the institution's complementary-care modalities: from acupuncture, to health and wellness coaching, to herbalism, and others. Both practitioners and patients are exposed to truly integrative health.

Students also benefit from several offsite practicum opportunities where other, more subtle tools are often employed. At Howard County General Hospital, the Johns Hopkins teaching hospital with which MUIH is affiliated, students are introduced to how yoga therapy can work in acute-care settings. They learn early how to hone their pitch and bedside manner; although doctors and nurses often refer their patients for yoga therapy, it's up to each patient to accept the service. Once students have gained consent, they work to ease suffering, often with breathing practices, meditation, guided imagery, and affirmations. Without any agenda except to meet patient needs as they present, yoga therapy students get to play a role that can be difficult for time-pressed practitioners in the acute-care setting to incorporate, offering patients a space to feel, breathe, and simply "be."

This October, MUIH will host a continuing education opportunity open to C-IAYTs. The first of its kind, the course will provide practitioners with the tools needed to successfully work in acute care—from assessment, to treatment, to communication of the plan of care in terms Western medical practitioners will understand.

At Integrace, a neurocognitive support facility and additional practicum site, sessions usually revolve around musculoskeletal issues and the alleviation of anxiety through breathing practices. These sessions incorporate both the client and the client's caregiver and often evolve into partner yoga therapy, where the caregiver is getting the more subtle therapy while the primary client is receiving more tangible care.

Another practicum opportunity exists in a partnership between MUIH and the University of Maryland Baltimore Washington Medical Center through Kelli Bethel, PT, C-IAYT. Students are invited to observe both the Therapeutic Yoga for Stroke and the Therapeutic Yoga for Cancer programs to experience client-centered therapy in another medical setting.

Students' practicum experience and classroom learning intersect in meaningful ways. Throughout their second year, coursework presents opportunities to develop therapeutic protocols that are then directly employed in the practicum setting. For example, in a course dedicated to the group therapeutic process, students are given the opportunity to create and present a workshop series for a given population. Many budding therapists use this as an opportunity to hone their practice around issues such as chronic pain and caregiver stress. The result is immediate reciprocal learning and the union of the theoretical and the practical.

This wide range of practicum experience is purposeful. "My primary focus is that they all leave employable . . . whether it's going to private practice, or group practice as part of an integrative health model," said Finlayson. "We want our students to be able to treat whoever shows up at that doorstep, with an understanding of who they are and what their needs are, with acceptance and deep understanding."



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