

# Professional Development

## Building the Business of Yoga Therapy

Each a strong connector in their own way, the group of yoga therapy innovators featured in this issue includes professionals from Europe and South America as well as the United States and Canada. These yoga therapists shaking things up are a psychiatric nurse, a PhD researcher, a contributor to cardiac rehab, and a kinesiologist. Although their work settings vary from the Dean Ornish program to a Brazilian University, from in-person conferences and private clinics to online sessions and traditional classroom settings, all are deeply engaged in the work of improving health and wellness care by helping individuals to transform themselves. Congratulations to these professionals for helping to change society one client at a time!

—Laurie Hyland Robertson

### SUSI HATELY

#### Show Them You Care



*As a young student of yoga, Susi Hately, C-IAYT, began to combine the ancient practices of yoga with her BSc in kinesiology at a Vancouver pain clinic. When she continued to encounter individuals, including yoga instructors, who accepted that their pain was “normal,” she began to explore how yoga was being taught and practiced. By*

*designing therapy programs that utilized sound anatomical principles of kinesiology with the time-honored practices of yoga, she enabled people to find pain relief and to rediscover vitality in their lives. Susi is the author of several best-selling yoga books, and her programs have been studied at the University of Calgary. Her work has set a new standard in mind-body rehabilitation for helping people prepare for and recover from surgeries; reduce flare-ups associated with conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis and lupus; as well as manage ongoing treatment protocols, including radiation and chemotherapy.*

I fell into the yoga business a bit by accident. I hadn't intended on building a business, it just happened to unfold that way. Back in the 90s I was using my degree in kinesiology as an exercise therapist at a pain clinic. The clinic's focus was on training the clients to get stronger and become more cardiovascularly fit in an effort to build their stamina to return to their jobs. Our tools were stationary bikes, stair-steppers, a room of weights, and another room of job-specific tools where we could mimic most every work position—sitting in front of a computer and lifting boxes of files, being on one's back similar to a plumber, standing and moving like a carpenter or painter, or sitting in awkward positions like a dental hygienist or esthetician.

I had begun taking yoga classes as a student and experienced tremendous benefit for my own persistent pain that I had been experiencing for 2 years as a result of injuries I sustained as an athlete, so I started to incorporate the breathing and yoga asana into my clients' exercise routines. Of course, I didn't really know what I was doing with yoga back then, but what I did worked, and my positive results with clients skyrocketed. I knew I was onto something, but back in

the late 90s I didn't know any yoga teachers who could earn a living teaching yoga.

Nevertheless, the love of helping people, of making a difference, and the desire to share what I knew stuck with me. I felt compelled to teach. By 1999, I had completed my yoga teacher training and had started with one class in a local yoga studio, and I slowly opened up therapeutic yoga classes in shared spaces (with a Pilates teacher, a gym, and a physical therapy clinic).

One student at a time, I grew a following over the course of a year. When I look back now, I see that two key factors grew my practice.

1. **Personalized attention in a group setting.** Each person received a customized yoga program so that even in the context of a group class she or he had very personal attention. At least 5 days prior to the class session beginning, I received my client's health form and goals. Based on that form, I created a program for them. Then, when we started the class, each person followed her or his program. This might sound complicated, but it wasn't really. All my classes required preregistration; I didn't permit drop-ins, because I wanted clients who would commit as much as I did. Each series of classes was between 7 and 9 weeks long, depending on the calendar. Each class had a maximum of ten people. And, each of my clients' programs included eight things to do, involving movement, breathing, or stillness practices. In the first week, I would teach them the first four, and in the second week I would teach them the next four. By week 3, everyone knew their program, and I would simply guide them as to when to shift positions or technique, provide points of awareness, reminders about movement and relaxation, and progress them in their particular programs as their bodies and minds integrated and changed. Since the programs were so personalized yet in a group setting, they were affordable and the results outstanding. People got out of pain quickly.
2. **Deeply caring.** I cared as much for my clients getting well as they did. They could see this in many of my actions, including these two examples.

First, at each session I checked in with each student individually by kneeling next to each person's mat. This was very much my style: quiet, individual, and personal.

When a new session was ready for registration, I would first ask the registrants of the current session if they wanted to join again and would ask prospective new clients to wait until I heard from the current students. I set a clear deadline so no one would be left hanging, and everyone—current and prospective clients alike—understood my commitment to them. It created a trusting, supportive, and healing space—and, over the years, a long waiting list. I have continued with that practice today with my one-to-one clients. Most schedule their sessions out for 6–9 months, and we know we are in this together.

These two elements have stayed consistent with time. This has led to a loyal following, many of whom continue to learn from me decades after they first joined even though they may no longer have symptoms and pain. When I look back now, I am really grateful I followed the inner compulsion to teach. Much of what I did then I still do today, and my business continues to grow steadily, mostly by referral, because I still demonstrate in every session that I care by providing personal attention that engages my clients where each one is.



## ANNEKE SIPS

### *Deep Connections, Big Results*



*Anneke Sips, RN, C-IAYT (anneke@networkyogatherapy.org), has worked as a psychiatric nurse for 20 years, a role she continues part-time today. She was one of the first IAYT-certified yoga therapists in The Netherlands and is the founder of Network Yoga Therapy and The Yoga Therapy Conference in Amsterdam. Anneke's expertise is in*

*yoga for mental health, especially trauma, change management, and psychosis.*

I am a connector. I love to meet people, to share and exchange, especially when people have different perspectives and views. I have always been curious about what moves people, their behavior, and their reasons. In 2010 I started Network Yoga Therapy, a multidisciplinary network of like-minded people with just one goal: connect professionals from the fields of yoga, healthcare, and science.

Based on what I've seen at work and in my personal life I believe there is space for the practices of yoga within mental healthcare. My teenage years were difficult, mainly because I was part of a religious community that didn't fit me very well. My father had entered this group when I was 6, and his way of looking at the world differed from my own. I questioned this belief system from a young age, but at 16 I made some big decisions when I was injured in an accident and needed a blood transfusion to survive. When this treatment was rejected by my father in the name of religion, big shifts happened for me. In short, the surgeon proceeded with the medical treatment, and I was excommunicated from this group. The story reached a peak when I was 18 and my father died. That same year, I found yoga.

The practice proved to be a great support to me during this time. My nursing studies started then as well, and I began working in psychiatry as a student. Since graduation, I have worked in many

different areas, but all have involved complex care, often with highly stigmatized groups disconnected from society, like patients with traumas, schizophrenia, and psychosis.

My first job as a nurse was in a closed ward working with adolescents. Partly because of my experiences as an adolescent who practiced yoga, I believed that yoga should have a place in treatment, but such a thing wasn't possible at that time. The head psychiatrist gave a clear no to my request to teach yoga! I knew yoga could be beneficial for the clients, but I wasn't able to articulate it very well back then. In answer to her rejection, I decided I needed to grow through dedicated study and practice of both yoga and psychiatry.

Fast-forward to 2010. I started Network Yoga Therapy from a need to meet like-minded people. I organized meetups for us and looked for opportunities to teach classes to psychiatry clients and professionals. These events were useful and fun, especially as we got to know one another, and I began to find my way as an organizer and bridgebuilder.

Most people in The Netherlands had never heard of yoga therapy at that time, so I organized another meetup and invited guest speakers like David Emerson, Holger Cramer, and some local yoga researchers. I promoted the event, and 145 curious people showed up—The Yoga Therapy Conference in The Netherlands was born! In 2019, we will hold our fourth conference, this time on The Science of Human Connection.

Our conference team is a multidisciplinary group of healthcare professionals who stand with one leg in the world of yoga and one in the healthcare field. Through this work I've seen clearly that often people in different fields share similar values and visions for the future, but we do not always speak the same language and therefore sometimes fail to connect. Through my own experiences as a teenager, I've learned how important it is to listen and find connection. In creating a safe space where everyone is heard, we find common ground and complement one another!

Because I use yoga in my work—alongside the above, I offer and facilitate therapeutic yoga programs online and in person—I have become a better listener as a nurse, too. I have become more

mindful and see my patients' self-healing qualities more easily. I can "sit on my hands" more, which de-stigmatizes and empowers patients, helping them trust their body signals and intuition. I use my online platforms, social media, and my voice—lecturing at conferences in yoga and healthcare—to create more awareness and reduce the stigma of mental health issues. I'm careful to note that yoga therapy is not a substitute for psychological therapy but that it can be an excellent complement.

The benefits of this connective approach mirror the trajectory my yoga therapy career has taken. First, as we each learn what the other therapies entail, we stop fearing one another. We build our network and have consultants and providers to whom to refer when we need them. Perhaps most importantly, the therapy itself can be adjusted to fit better when all the practitioners involved communicate together about each client.

The power of communication and connection is immense. When I started Network Yoga Therapy, the field didn't exist in my country. Today, I am integrating yoga therapy programs at the Dutch Ministry of Defense and continuing to do my original work, so my efforts may result in a bit more consciousness and a healthier Earth for our future generations!

## DANILO FORGHIERI SANTAELLA

### *Evidence-Based Yoga Therapy*

*Danilo Forghieri Santaella, PhD, trained under the guidance of Prof. Marcos Rojo, who represents Kaivalyadhama in São Paulo, Brazil, at the Instituto de Ensino e Pesquisas em Yoga. Danilo started teaching yoga in 2000. His undergraduate studies were in physical education, and he became a yoga specialist through Kaivalyadhama's course led by Rojo. Danilo's education continued with a master's and a PhD degree, both in science, at the University of São Paulo, and postdoctoral courses in neuroscience. He now serves as a professor of yoga at that university and coordinates postgraduate yoga therapy courses in private universities. He also sees private yoga therapy clients in their homes.*

Since the beginning of my undergraduate studies, I've intended to find a way of working with mind, body, and soul in an integrated way. When I encountered yoga in the sports center at my university, I knew I'd found it! My mind and my students, however, kept asking me questions I could not answer based on the few scientific papers then available on yoga as therapy.

I entered a master's degree program at the University of São Paulo Medical School to investigate the effects of *savasana* (corpse pose) on postexercise hypotension of hypertensive patients and on their reactivity to mental stress. Along with this 3-year project, I started teaching yoga at the university's sports center, sharing the post with my tutor, Prof. Rojo. I had 150 elderly students at that time, divided into three classes of 50 each. Senescence, the biological aging process, brings about many changes (usually declines) in physiological and cognitive systems and processes. I knew I therefore needed to establish a therapeutic relationship with the students, indicating dos and don'ts for each and every one of them.

After the master's degree, it was time to take a step further, and I went on to do my PhD investigation on the effects of *bhastrika*

*pranayama* (bellows breath) on the heart-rate variability of elderly people. At the same time, I helped Rojo during his investigation on the effects of specific yoga techniques (*kapalabhati*, *uddiyana bandha*, and *agni sara*—skull-shining breath, abdominal lock, and fire-essence practice) on the respiratory function of patients with Duchenne muscular dystrophy. After we published the results in respected medical journals, we started including yoga therapy in Rojo's yoga specialization course, where I now work as a co-manager. Partly as a result of our efforts, the field of yoga investigation grew dramatically in Brazil, and I was asked to integrate dozens of evaluation boards for PhD theses, which further strengthened respect for yoga in our country. My job at the university brings me in touch with at least 600 new students every semester.

My inquisitive nature led me to take two postdoctoral positions in neuroscience, and I am about to publish another paper on the effect of yoga practice on brain connectivity in elderly people. During numerous trips to India, I have also undertaken experiential yoga therapy courses with Mukund Vinayak Bhole, MD, DSc (yoga), a former director of Kaivalyadhama Yoga Research Center in Lonavla, India, and creator of a specific approach for self-diagnosis and treatment. Today, this approach is the leading subject of our postgraduate yoga therapy course, which includes deep study of Western physiology, psychology, pathology, and the innumerable modern papers that continue to produce evidence for treatment through yoga. We will keep spreading the good news of the positive effects of a well-oriented and diligent application of yoga as therapy.

Over the course of my work, I have noticed growing interaction among health professionals as doctors and psychologists refer patients to us and we refer ours to them. Here in Brazil, yoga and ayurveda have recently been included in the National Health Policy for Complementary and Integrative Practices. It is time for yoga therapists to take our place in health institutions and show the other healthcare professionals that we are able to work in a collaborative and evidence-based way to help patients get the best restorative care possible.

## COURTNEY BUTLER ROBINSON

### *Integrating, with Heart*

*Courtney Butler Robinson, C-IAYT, E-RYT 500, RYCT, RYPT, is also certified in Yoga for 12 Step Recovery and in Prime of Life Yoga.*



*Courtney is the author of The Mud & The Lotus: A Guide and Workbook for Students of Yoga. As a yoga therapist, Courtney works as the stress management specialist for the Dr. Dean Ornish Reversal Clinic at Saline Heart Group, under the supervision of Allan B. Hatch, MD. She owns Balance Yoga and Wellness, a registered yoga school, and trains teachers in holistic yoga practices. She leads workshops and presents at conferences throughout the United States.*

As a child in the 1970s, I was introduced to yoga on PBS through Liliás Folan, with whom I later had the privilege of studying. I became a regular and serious practitioner at age 18. As I learned, I began to develop a holistic yogic lifestyle, and it

has stayed with me. In college, I earned degrees in early childhood education and management that have served me well in working with children with disabilities and later with all populations dealing with health challenges and also in owning my own yoga business.

One day, with a stressed-out student in teacher training, I said, “I care more about your heart than your headstand.” This became my personal philosophy. In letting go of who I was not, I discovered who I was—and that ultimately led me to the path of yoga therapy.

Today, I see clients who are undergoing intensive cardiac rehab as part of the Ornish Reversal Program, which meets twice a week for 4 hours at a time. The cardiology office where I work is currently the only host of this program in the state, and I have had the honor of training many medical professionals as well as Veterans Administration staff members. I’ve also worked with the University of Arkansas to develop a program for their community—the Arkansas Extension Division asked me to help them with a children’s yoga program they were developing for the public schools. That effort has since blossomed into training others, who now teach seniors as well as kids in underserved rural areas with limited resources.

In 2019, I will turn over my yoga school to my lead teacher and redirect my focus on developing programs for yoga in healthcare settings. When asked for advice, I tell people to study what interests them and also to learn about the business of yoga. People often get into yoga teaching to share the practice of yoga—and running a yoga business can be quite different. I wrote extensively about this topic in my book, *The Mud & The Lotus*.

My goal in yoga therapy is to foster a sense of empowerment and independence. Most clients are with me for a designated purpose and timeframe because of the structure of the Ornish program, which includes breathwork, progressive relaxation, imagery, postures, and meditation. Participants come for 18 sessions, then, if they’ve requested it, I refer them to other teachers, medical professionals, or local classes appropriate for their specific needs.

I am often asked about my work with Ornish. I usually answer that it’s easier to incorporate yoga therapy into your work if you’re currently working in the medical field. However, if you are not a medical professional, seek education in the area you wish to work. Like every yoga therapist, I came to the field via a personal route, in my case a path that included my own experience of chronic asthma and pain, a unique educational background, and time as a hospital volunteer. I advise my students to reach out to local hospitals and programs in their field of interest. Be prepared to explain what you do, how you do it, and why you do it. When Ornish needed a yoga therapist for a local position, they reached out to a community yoga leader, who referred them to me. At that time, I was offering yoga workshops and retreats with a focus on yoga therapy.

In my view, organizations like IAYT are working tirelessly with the medical community to build support for yoga therapy. Although yoga therapists now work in a variety of settings from medical facilities to private practice, in the future I hope to see yoga therapy become as common as chiropractic services. **YTT**



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