



All Party Parliamentary Group on

appg **Yoga in Society**

Yoga and the Long-Term Plan: Simple Solutions to Impart Wellness

The value of yoga as a body-mind intervention in healthcare already has wide national and international applications in many provider settings, this has shown to improve patient care and reduce healthcare usage. These yoga-based therapeutic interventions are quality-assured, evidence-based programs that manage patients' conditions through supported self-management. The risk of harm is very small, the investment in infrastructure and delivery very low, and value as judged by clinicians and patients is high.

We have done a comprehensive, line-by-line review of the NHS Long-Term Plan to identify domains within the plan that would benefit most from yoga's input to help make the plan a success. Below are important considerations for yoga's inclusion in healthcare delivery. They have the most rigorous evidence for yoga's efficacy and are also relatively simple to implement:

- **Expanding community-based care.** Offering greater access to care for patients who have a high risk of hospitalisation, high care complexity or high cost to the health system. We can use risk-stratification to find registered patients with the greatest risk, including those with long-term conditions, dementia, severe mental health issues, frailty and vulnerability (e.g. homelessness).
- **Improving mental health.** Research finds that yoga's greatest value is in stress reduction, emotional regulation, and mood improvement. Research highlights yoga's benefits within depression, anxiety and anxiety-spectrum disorders, and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder.
- **Promoting resilience of NHS staff.** The two greatest causes of staff absences are depression, anxiety and low back pain; areas where yoga demonstrates the most significant efficacy. Notably, Hartfiel et al. (2017) compared an 8-week yoga programme for lower-back pain against a passive control for the NHS. Those who participated in the yoga programme had a cumulative sickness absence of 2 days, compared with 43 days for the control.
- **Reducing unplanned admissions.** Participation in yoga can help prevent falls and acute exacerbation of long-term conditions such as non-cardiac chest pain, COPD, end-of-life care and chronic pain by using supported management and teaching self-regulation to decrease health anxiety.
- **Helping young people with wellbeing.** Supporting children in reducing obesity, improving mental health, and decreasing behaviour problems.
- **Increasing primary prevention.** Yoga reduces negative health behaviours, while buttressing balance, physical and emotional strength, and resilience.
- **More patient activation.** Through teaching health professionals basic, but highly effective, evidence-based yoga skills for reducing depression and anxiety to use with their patients, patients gain agency in their own wellbeing.

Much of the above could be accomplished by working with Integrated Care systems, Primary Care Networks and through Social Prescribing.

The strongest evidence for yoga is within mental health conditions, followed by musculoskeletal problems and rehabilitation, and metabolic disorders, for both for adults and children. Given yoga's capacity to evoke parasympathetic response, increase heart-rate variability, increase baroreceptor sensitivity, and reduce inflammatory markers it is efficacious in reducing symptoms and improving management of a broad range of health conditions.

Enablers

- Digital platforms for staff and patients. This may include using the NHS website to offer free breathwork teaching, and online learning of yoga skills for staff.
- Through continuing professional development, staff learn effective yoga techniques to work with patients. For example, in West London, clinicians were offered three-hour training sessions in coherent breathing. This technique was easily taught to patients, who exhibited high compliance and significant stress reduction.
- Connecting with social prescribing policy.
- Liaising with community services, including police and shelters, to reach the homeless and those with severe mental health complications.

We request support in implementing a staged plan to influence health policy, including:

- A meeting with Lord Prior to further discuss this initiative.
- Support from Lord Prior to meet with the NHS Board and propose our ideas to James Sanderson.
- The creation of an economic case regarding yoga's value in healthcare. This case will be presented by James and Heather to the NHS Board.