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RE: NHS Yoga Initiative, All Party Parliamentary Group
To Whom It May Concern,

There is currently strong evidence for a worldwide explosive growth in the practice of yoga by the general public. A 2012 survey by the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institutes of Health indicated that 10% of the U.S. population is actively practicing yoga for health purposes, with a remarkable 50% increase in prevalence from the previous 2007 survey. A UK survey has also reported an increasing trend. There are now a number of yoga therapy associations internationally, numerous training and certification programs in formalized yoga therapy schools, many books on treatment of specific diseases with yoga therapy, and regular multiple international yoga therapy conferences.

Coincident with the growth in yoga therapy internationally, has been the dramatic escalation in biomedical clinical research on yoga therapy, reflected in an increase in the evidence base of peer-reviewed biomedical publications. Our 2015 published bibliometric analysis revealed over 450 yoga therapy research publications in peer-reviewed journals. This represents a 3-fold increase from the analysis conducted 10 years earlier, and the trend appears to be exponential in nature. Other literature reviews and systematic reviews are consistent with this trend. This relatively new field of yoga therapy began with the first published trials conducted by a UK researcher in the 1970's. As with any new biomedical research field, most of this research is preliminary in nature, however, the scientific rigor of this research is growing apace with the increase in the number of publications, as evidenced by the increase in the utilization of the gold standard randomized controlled trials. Some of these randomized trials have been published in leading journals and have received widespread media attention, such as the University of York research on yoga for low back pain. The growth in quantity and quality of the body of yoga therapy research has grown sufficiently to support, the appearance of new yoga research journals, the publication of numerous review papers, and a recent edited medical textbook entitled The Principles and Practice of Yoga in Health Care by a UK publisher. This evidence base is now being used to justify the inclusion of yoga therapy in a number of clinical venues, especially in integrative medicine centers. Particularly noteworthy is the widespread and growing inclusion of yoga in Veterans Administration medical centers in the U.S., and the decision by Medicare in the U.S. to reimburse the costs of a yoga-based cardiac rehabilitation program.

Also important, has been the advancement in the science and research elucidating the underlying mechanisms of yoga practices, including the effects of physical yoga postures and exercises, breath regulation techniques, deep relaxation practices and meditation/mindfulness practices, both individually, and as a whole together as they appear in traditional yoga practice. This basic research has indicated that yoga has profound effects on physical characteristics such as flexibility, balance and coordination, on respiratory characteristics including breath capacities, volumes and gas exchange, on mental characteristics including emotion and stress regulation, mood and resilience, and cognitive functioning, and even on deeper quality of life characteristics including life meaning and purpose and spirituality. These benefits are especially relevant for risk factors leading to preventable noncommunicable lifestyle diseases including disorders such as cardiovascular diseases, obesity, diabetes, mental health conditions, and disorders of elderly cognitive decline, which represent the greatest mortality and burden on the health care system. Particularly striking and convincing are the results of neuroimaging studies showing changes in brain activity, biochemistry and structure, and of genomic expression studies showing up and down regulation of gene activity, which have provided objective support for the observed psychophysiological and behavioral benefits of yoga practice.

I would be happy to provide additional information, documents and details on this information on the science and research evidence on yoga and yoga therapy.

Sincerely,

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