

YOGA – ADJUNCT TO PSYCHIATRIC TREATMENT IN POST WAR TRAUMA SUFFERERS:

Carter, JJ; Byrne, G.

Objectives: Eight Vietnam War Veterans and one World War II veteran were offered yoga as an adjunct to their ordinary psychiatric treatment to see if any further improvement occurred. All patients had been in long term treatment, and yoga was offered as an extra treatment. The primary diagnosis of eight was Post traumatic stress disorder, and the ninth was Major Depression. All had depressive symptomatology as measured by the Hamilton Rating Scale and the CESD self rating scale for depression.

Methods: A series of poses prescribed by BKS Iyengar, a foremost world authority of yoga therapy were instituted. One Veteran was too avoidant to join the group, but did the poses at home, two veterans took private classes after 1-2 group sessions. The remaining 6 completed the group. The test group had six weekly sessions of one hour's duration. Yoga authorities recommend three sessions per week of ninety minutes duration.

Results obtained: All improved significantly in their Hamilton Rating Scale and CESD self rating scale. At the end of the six weeks no veterans had measurably significant depression on either the Hamilton Rating Scale or the CESD self rating scale.

Anger and insomnia were the symptoms less amenable to improvement in the depression series without specific breathing poses (pranayama) and sarvasana (corpse pose), which are part of the prescribed sequence.

Follow-up: An anger management series of poses was then instituted, and expression of anger arousal improved, as did insomnia. Maximum benefit to insomnia occurred only after the addition of pranayama and sarvasana. Depression often broke through when there was an exclusive emphasis on the sedating postures of anger management, and poses for depression had to be reinstated along with the sedating poses of anger management. Thus far all insomnia sufferers have responded somewhat to pranayama and sarvasana.

The results are discussed, including the dynamics of the poses used to cure depression, and the poses to sedate, and a description of pranayama and sarvasana.

Follow up and new groups are continuing.

Reflections: A subsequent depression group was administered during the time of gearing up for war with Iraq. The improvement was much slower with this group. The recommended dose of yoga sessions by yoga professionals is three sessions of 90 minutes duration per week. In our test groups one session of one hour's duration was used. Whilst this was enough during peace times, it was insufficient during times of world unrest. Further groups of more sessions per week and of longer duration per session will be offered in the future.

A series of yoga poses specific to PTSD sufferers has been developed. Further research is continuing with this specific group of poses for these sufferers.

It is concluded that the poses for depression elevate mood, at least for a short time. Pranayama and sarvasana are needed to alleviate insomnia. The sedating poses for anger management are effective especially in the short term but do not help depression and may even augment it if used alone.