

All One: A Profile of Lisa Kaley-Isley, Ph.D.

It took only moments for the editors to choose a member to profile for this edition of the Colorado Psychologist. Once they had decided on mind-body as the topic of the issue, “Lisa Kaley-Isley” immediately rang out in the room. Dr. Kaley-Isley—past CPA president and current chair of the Mind-Body Task Force—personifies the movement that has invigorated the field and opened up entire new areas for research, practice, and wellness. Just as the mind-body movement has gradually washed away some of the dualistic notions in psychological theory, Dr. Kaley-Isley has flowed along an ever-broadening career path to reach a place of wholeness. Today she is Chief of Psychology at The Children’s Hospital (TCH), pursues research in yoga therapy with children, and will be the clinical director of a new Integrated Health clinic at TCH this summer that will include complimentary and alternative medicine (CAM).

Dr. Kaley-Isley’s education and early career work were typically mainstream. She studied clinical psychology at the University of Tennessee in the late ‘80s with an emphasis on intrapersonal and interpersonal psychotherapy. But even back then when graduate programs in health psychology were scarce, Dr. Kaley-Isley was looking to expand her understanding of the person. She sought out an internship in a medical setting so that she could add a bodily component to her therapeutic framework. And thus she arrived at The Children’s Hospital in Denver in 1990.

Dr. Kaley-Isley’s ascent to the top of TCH has been a process of unfolding and discovery, rather than as an achievement-driven pursuit. Right after her internship, she returned to Tennessee and then moved to Chicago for personal reasons. In Tennessee, she worked in a university counseling center and a community mental health center doing testing, consulting, and providing individual, family and group therapies. In Chicago she returned to a hospital training environment, entered private practice, and provided testing and supervision at a number of community treatment centers. Dr. Kaley-Isley wrote grants to fund her provision of psychological services such as testing, therapy, and consultation to five homeless and battered women’s shelters in Chicago.

When the time was right, she returned to Colorado as a postdoctoral fellow in Public Psychology and Administration at the Health Sciences Center. This turned out to be a pivotal opportunity for professional expansion. To her already solid background in psychotherapy, health psychology, and community psychology, she added skills in program administration, the policy and politics of state and regional mental health systems, and shortly afterwards, school psychology.

Dr. Kaley-Isley was now poised to affect change at the systems level, as well as with individual clients. “I have always been interested in larger systems,” she explained. “My father was a lawyer and probate judge in Georgia and he was active in politics as

a state legislator. He taught me that you have to contribute, to speak up. If you don't, others will and you might not necessarily like what others do. If you aren't at the table, you don't have any influence."

Dr. Kaley-Isley returned to Children's Hospital when an opportunity arose in 1998. She directed the Psychology Internship Program for 10 years and held many other positions in administration, outpatient services, and research. Unlike many psychologists who labor in large organizations, she does not see administration as just a necessary evil that comes with the job. Rather, administration can be a means of creating opportunities for other people. And she certainly has done just that. When she began running the internship program, TCH had only 3 interns who were paid a mere \$10,000 annually. When she stepped down as director, TCH offered 6 internship slots at \$24,000 each (the highest paid interns in Denver), 8 pre-doctoral extern placements, and 2 post-doctoral fellowships. The number of psychologists employed by the department had also increased significantly.

Dr. Kaley-Isley plunged more deeply into the mind-body movement a few years ago when she partnered with the new Chair of the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at TCH to devise a plan for offering yoga to children with medical diagnoses. Dr. Kaley-Isley, already a committed yoga practitioner and teacher herself, was eager to explore the feasibility and efficacy of a yoga program in a hospital setting. So they hired the most senior yoga teacher in Denver, patiently negotiated with several medical groups within TCH for approval and referrals, and sent out flyers to Denver-area children's programs. They received almost a hundred telephone calls just from people who saw the flyers pinned up in clinics, doctors' offices, residential treatment programs, and the like.

Although only a few of the interested families could surmount the logistical difficulties of transporting their youngsters to TCH regularly, the results of the first program were encouraging enough for the team to develop an intensive, 8-week yoga offering based in part on the groundbreaking work of mindfulness guru Jon Kabat-Zinn, Ph.D. The 2.5-hour weekly class encompasses asanas (traditional yoga poses), pranayama (breathing exercises), meditation, and yoga nidra (deep relaxation) as taught by yoga master Rod Stryker. Now that the expanded program is up and running, Dr. Kaley-Isley is co-teaching the classes and leading the evaluation. She speaks often on the novel program at seminars, conferences, and professional meetings.

One exciting aspect of Dr. Kaley-Isley's work is that it illustrates APA's position that psychologists are *health* providers. When psychologists loosen their attachment to the adjective "mental," they free themselves from a career straightjacket, are viewed differently by other health professionals, and most importantly, have more to offer their clients. Yoga, massage, and herbs, like psychotherapy and medication, are all tools of healing for the human person, a unity that encompasses a mind, body, and soul. "Ninety-six percent of adults say they are interested in spirituality," Dr. Kaley-Isley pointed out, citing a recent article in the [American Psychologist](#) and findings

posted on the National Center for Complimentary and Alternatives Medicine (NCCAM)'s website. Psychotherapy has evolved past the intrapersonal, through the social, around the body, and into the spirit.

Given the level of responsibility that Dr. Kaley-Isley shoulders every day, it isn't surprising that she consciously manages her free time to support her own health and wellness. Besides her regular yoga regimen, she has a near-daily meditation and pranayama practice. She spends as much time as possible on the weekends outside and with her husband and cats. Attending to her own growth and learning as a person has given her the stamina to persist and thrive in a large, hierarchical institution such as Children's.

Dr. Kaley-Isley has been involved with CPA since 1997. In fact, "I joined CPA before I moved to Colorado to help me look for jobs," she laughed. There is no question, however, that she has given far more than she has received from the association. At the urging of former Executive Director Nancy Betts and then President Bill Sobesky, Dr. Kaley-Isley chaired the Legislative Committee, which led to other roles and eventually to her own year as President. She currently serves as the Colorado representative on the APA Council of Representatives.

A devotion to service —the true, selfless kind that benefits others— is part of what motivates Dr. Kaley-Isley. She, like so many other CPA members, is a caregiver by nature. The fact that she has had professional success as well demonstrates the value of doing what comes naturally. Moreover, Dr. Kaley-Isley never rejected any school of thought or career role that came her way. Instead she accepted each one in turn and integrated them into a wonderful whole. Dr. Kaley-Isley has become the consummate psychologist: a therapist, researcher, and administrator all in one.

This article is part of an occasional series profiling psychologists and non-profit agencies in Colorado. If you have a suggestion for a psychologist or an agency that CPA members might enjoy reading about, please send your ideas to mecallaway@comcast.net