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Editorial

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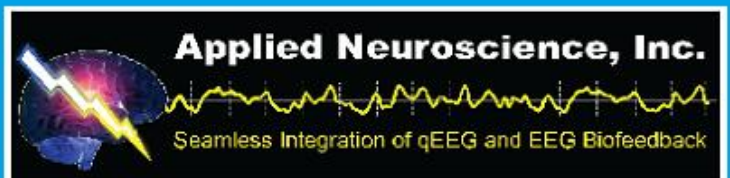
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EDITORIAL

A central lesson of science is that to understand complex issues (or even simple ones), we must try to free our minds of dogma and to guarantee the freedom to publish, to contradict, and to experiment. Arguments from authority are unacceptable.

—Carl Sagan

The young man sat in my office asking questions about neurofeedback. What exactly was it? Would it help him? Was it reimbursable by insurance? What was the scientific evidence that it worked? This last question was particularly pressing to him. He had been in an automobile accident and under the care of a local neurologist for the past year. He had stopped improving and was being told by his neurologist that he had likely recovered as much function as was possible and that he needed to begin to work on accepting his limitations. He had discovered neurofeedback on the Internet and had asked the neurologist about it, as it indicated that it could help him continue to improve. His neurologist told him: "... absolutely not..." It did not work and was a waste of time and money. Still clinging to hope, the young man had come to see me to see what I might have to say.

I explained that I could not guarantee what the results would be but that we did often find that individuals in his condition did experience additional improvement with neurofeedback. I pointed him to the published research and stated that I would be happy to talk to his doctor about what neurofeedback is and what the research indicates about its effectiveness. I called the neurologist and explained the reason for my call and offered that I would be delighted to talk with him about the effectiveness of neurofeedback. He replied that he did not need to talk with me as he already knew it did not work. I replied that I would be happy to provide some of the most recent peer-reviewed research for his consideration,

as much new work had been done that perhaps he was not aware of. He again replied that he had no need of the publications as he already knew that it was a fraud and did not work. Fortunately, the young man decided to proceed despite the neurologist's opinion and, as often happens, continued to gain functionality and a higher quality of life.

This is a familiar story for many of us who have been providing neurofeedback services over the years. It is troubling to wonder how many people never get neurofeedback because the voice of authority has spoken and they are unwilling or unable to risk questioning or disobeying it. As the quote from Carl Sagan states, scientific discovery is completely dependent on our ability to be freed from biases, presuppositions, and "accepted" knowledge. It is increasingly evident that allopathic medicine has succumbed to the mythology that the most important and fundamental "truths" about health knowledge have been discovered and that modern medicine is about tweaking the edges to refine and perfect what we already know. Sagan reminds us that if science has taught us anything, it should have taught us that we can never know everything and everything must be subject to question, experimentation, and contradiction. The *Journal of Neurotherapy* has always and continues to try and be a repository of that challenging of "authoritative" knowledge and a source of contradiction, experimentation, and the attempt to "deflate" those who would have us believe we know it all.

At the same time, I would invite those who know the "truth" of neurofeedback and how effective it is to remain open to the challenges and questioners and cynics who would ask us to provide the evidence of our claims. In reading through the various list serves and listening to some of the discussions at conferences and gatherings, it is clear that some

within the neurofeedback community sound as absolutely certain and uninformed as the neurologist at the beginning of this piece. We do not enhance or further our cause by being just as closed to doubt and discovery as those in the other communities. In an attempt to keep us as a profession out of the trap of certainty, I want to direct your attention to the collaborative neurofeedback project, which consists of a group of neurofeedback specialists as well as a group of academic psychiatrists such as the Ohio State University researchers who presented the results of their preliminary study of the effectiveness of neurofeedback and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder at last year's conference. There is no science that is perfect, and some have been concerned that such collaboration is akin to cavorting with the enemy, but it is essential to any genuine search for knowledge that all who wish to participate be invited and welcomed. Otherwise the only thing that will be discovered will be propaganda. I would also like to remind the

community that the International Society for Neurofeedback and Research continues to develop and refine a means for members to quickly and easily appeal insurance denials by using the regulations in place regarding parity for mental health with medical coverage as a result of the passage of the Wellstone-Domenici Parity law.

The hubris of the intelligent human is easily found in every human endeavor. We struggle to accept that we are perhaps not the pinnacle of creation and that we continue to know much less than we realize. To quote Carl Sagan one more time,

It is of interest to note that while some dolphins are reported to have learned English—up to fifty words used in correct context—no human being has been reported to have learned dolphinese.

Randall R. Lyle
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