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Winning the War

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Winning The War

Stanley Nathanson

Co-Founder of the Drake Institute of Behavioral Medicine

When Sigmund Freud introduced his new theory of humans as sexually-driven beings, he set off a war. It became a conflict between existing views which society, in its own wise and inevitable way, fought through toward the truth, driving a step closer to understanding the mystery of our kind.

Go further back in time, or go further ahead, and the story repeats itself, only with different characters—over and over again. And we go forward.

In 1994, at a neurofeedback conference in Key West, I overheard a group of equipment manufacturers expressing grave concern for the future of brainwave biofeedback. They were discussing strategies for traveling the difficult road ahead, trying to bypass the manhole they feared most: the FDA, coupled with Russell Barkley and the rumors that American drug companies were blocking biofeedback's passage. The equipment manufacturers felt that this sinister group would stop the forward motion of a new and successful treatment for Attention Deficit Disorder. There was talk of going underground to avoid the FDA. Once again, it was war.

This war was on for the benefit of millions, whose health and safety were being thwarted by the interests of a mere handful. I felt that we could not lose. Like all universal truths, this one, too, would prevail.

In hindsight, I was being unfair to my Key West colleagues. It was not appropriate for me to interject and tell them that Eye to

Eye with Connie Chung, a nationally syndicated news program, had been monitoring three of our patients over the past several months. I could not tell them that the very issue they spoke of was going to be brought into thousands of American living rooms in a matter of two or three months.

In June of the same year, the story aired and the truth was revealed. Mr. Barkley comported himself as a man with a hidden agenda, while our patients spoke the candid and moving truth. We had won an important battle.

I had been unfair to the manufacturers in Key West in other ways as well. That my biofeedback institute was a medical facility meant that we would ultimately be backed by the medical profession. The medical establishment invariably upholds one core principal: the physician's right to administer whichever treatment he or she deems fit. This has long been the sacred cow of all medical authorities—a first amendment right of the club. This was not something that my Key West colleagues could count on. I loved the passion and commitment these fellow conference attendees showed for their work and the field. They were my friends. I wish I could have told them that we would ALL eventually win.

We are entering 1995 and the war is almost finished. There will be no Battle of the Bulge. I truly believe it is over. Barkley and his right hand, a.k.a. C.H.A.D.D., have their own, brand-new battle to fight. In the last few months, the national news media has exposed the overwriting of prescription

drugs—even in the case of controlled substances. Many physicians have, with their right to use any treatment they deem fit, prescribed drugs which have not been tested for safety or efficacy in children. While our opponents have demanded double blind studies on neurofeedback, they have been liberally prescribing “off label” drugs to five- and ten-year old children for decades. Whatever happened to “Thou shalt heal the sick and do no harm?” This is not an afterthought of American medicine. This is our oath.

This activity has occurred with the involvement of major drug companies, who have under-represented their cash contributions to C.H.A.D.D. The funds drug companies funneled into C.H.A.D.D. indirectly funded Barkley’s campaign against neurofeedback in the form of newsletters sent

under the aegis of C.H.A.D.D. There is more to come with regard to this matter, including who sparked the FDA’s involvement in this affair. They have their own war to fight, and now we can get down to finishing ours.

The insurance companies have often dodged their responsibility to pay for neurotherapy treatment for Attention Deficit Disorder. Have they acted in bad faith, and can that bad faith be exposed now? Their subscribers have paid in advance for health expenses; it’s time for the insurance companies to keep up their end of the bargain.

Our energies can now be channeled into providing the most effective and fullest uses of this benign and successful treatment. Our integrity to our oath to heal the sick and do no harm will be fulfilled. We’re back on course.