A major problem in biofeedback today is that the vast majority of people providing biofeedback-based services are not members of the Association of Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback (AAPB). Many of these people seem to have very little training to deepen their understanding of how the techniques should be performed or to broaden their horizons on what can be done with their equipment within the scope of their professions. We need to reach out to these people to improve competence levels within the field. Many of our own members have great difficulty getting the continuing education they need for the same purposes.

Largely to meet these needs, we are greatly increasing our distance-based continuing education programs and have transformed this superb newsmagazine into a publicly available journal. We are placing advertisements for our educational offerings (along with pointers to our web site) in the newsletters and journals of many of the professional societies whose members may already use biofeedback or might wish to do so. We need your help in identifying places where we should be advertising and ways to contact people doing biofeedback. Please send your ideas to me at rsherman@nwinet.com.

Helping the Public and Practitioners Become Aware of What Biofeedback Can Do and Who Can Do It

The general public needs to be made aware that well-substantiated interventions and training using biofeedback-based techniques are available for many conditions. As I have said in this column before, huge surveys have demonstrated that the public simply is not aware of our techniques. Other studies have shown that people now use the Internet to look for treatments for their disorders, ways to handle their problems, and ways to improve their performance. Our Web site has been redesigned so practitioners and potential patients looking for treatments as well as people looking for optimal functioning techniques can easily find information supporting the use of biofeedback-based techniques. It is imperative that our site pop up when somebody searches the web for ways to treat a disorder they have or to function better in business, sports, music, etc. Thus, we are going to put a substantial part of our budget into optimizing the Web site so it does so.

Another major step involving the Web site is the recent addition of a “yellow pages” section listing providers who can knowledgeably and legally offer the above services. At this time, people wanting biofeedback-based training have no real way to identify an appropriate provider—especially if they live in rural areas. Addition of the yellow pages completes the process from educating potential clients to assisting them in finding appropriate care.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with ideas, questions, etc., at rsherman@nwinet.com.

—Richard A. Sherman, PhD

From the President-Elect: Biofeedback

PPOs—Has the Time Arrived?

Over the years, I have been actively involved in explorations of biofeedback service delivery. Like all of you, I cannot believe that the kind of outcomes we all see in our clinics every day are not in greater demand. Why doesn’t AAPB have 20,000 members? I will never forget our shock at the Las Vegas meeting when we realized that the National Elk Breeders Association was bigger than AAPB. What is wrong with this picture?

Recently, I have been in conversations with a large complimentary and alternative medicine (CAM) preferred provider organization (PPO) that has been very successful in offering CAM interventions as a supplement to more traditional health benefits. They recruit practitioners to offer services for a reduced rate in order to be on a vast referral list for a fixed number of sessions. The paperwork is minimal and pay turnaround time is very rapid. This model has been successful in bringing chiropractors and acupuncturists large numbers of referrals, and because of the low overhead in administration, these practitioners seem very satisfied with the plan. This company is now ready to include biofeedback in their mix of offerings, and we have been exploring mod-
els that might work. If successful, this type of service delivery would create a tremendous demand for qualified biofeedback service deliverers. I tried to make some estimates as to what fee structure would be attractive enough for us on the provider end, but still economical enough for the company to make money. I guessed that $60 per session might be the minimum biofeedback professionals would accept. I also guessed that we would need six to eight sessions at minimum.

Keeping in mind that this sort of arrangement might fill every available clinical hour, what do you think of these estimates? I would like to hear from you, the working biofeedback clinician. Is this an attractive model? What sort of credentials should they require to be on the panel?

Another model we discussed is yoking a biofeedback therapist to a chiropractor for pain treatment. This would entail allowing chiropractors in their panel to get six to eight additional sessions for biofeedback to complement the physical modalities usually done by the chiropractor. I have been working with a chiropractor in this way for years, and we both believe that our success rate is far greater with the combination than either alone. Under this model, the biofeedback therapist might be paid less so that the chiropractor would profit and cover extra costs. Is there an interest in this model? What would be a minimal per patient fee for these practitioners? This group has over 20,000 chiropractors in their panel. If 10% took advantage of this offer, we would need 2,000 practitioners to fill the slots. That is more than our AAPB membership.

Help! I need some initial feedback from our working members. E-mail me your comments and thoughts at rgevirtz@alliant.edu. At a later time we may have to do a more comprehensive survey, but initial feedback would be useful. There are millions of people out there who would benefit from our expertise. Let us find a way to let them know what we have to offer.

—Richard Gevirtz, PhD

From the Executive Director: Bursting With Pride

The feeling of bursting with pride comes at times of great pleasure and pride in one’s life. I have been privileged to have a number of occasions to show this feeling, and the most recent one was in conjunction with the recent visit of our AAPB delegation to Washington, DC. Paul Lehrer graciously prepared the detailed report of our efforts elsewhere in this magazine. I want to share with you the feeling of the 2 days we were there.

First of all, our team was dedicated. This event had been planned in co-sponsorship with the Federation of Behavioral, Cognitive, and Social Sciences for over 1 year. We were scheduled to hold the program last June but the date we were holding was the day of the Reagan funeral and we had to reschedule. Therefore, we had been planning for a long while.

Lehrer acted as session chair and presented an overview of the day later followed by a review of his work. Bob Whitehouse presented data on the efficacy of biofeedback, and Vince Monastra shared his work on attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Frank Andrasik and Oli Palsson gave solid evidence for their work on headache and incontinence.

During the day there were about 50 attendees, and I sat in the audience and chatted with them and watched and gauged reactions. Attendees came from the American Psychological Association (APA), the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and local universities (both students and faculty), as well as several local AAPB members. We gave the morning presentations; there was a break for lunch, which really was not a break, but rather continued conversation by the attendees with our team; and then we finished the afternoon with data-based presentations. The day concluded with our NIH speakers. It was wonderful to hear Margaret Chesney acknowledge her roots in biofeedback and to hear Peter Kaufman compliment our work.

All of this effort could not have been possible without the guidance and support of our colleagues at the federation. Thanks go to Barbara Wanchisen, executive director of the federation, for her direction and wisdom, and to Jill Egeth, policy analyst, for organizing our schedule and seeing us through two days of intense program.

The next morning, Steve Baskin joined us for Phase 2 of our Washington, DC, event—visits to the legislature. Monastra and Palsson had to return to work, so we regrouped with Wanchisen and Egeth joining us. Dividing into two teams, we made legislative visits. An intense schedule between the House and the Senate office building ensued for 6 hours. The feedback and the interest we were shown went far beyond our expectations. I have been on a number of Hill visits before and they tend to be quite similar. The legislative assistants who are assigned to meet with you are polite and attentive. They listen and sometimes ask a few questions and take your card for follow-up. Sometimes the card and
the handout material are the best thing you can do because they go in a file and you can hope that if your topic ever hits that office again, they will remember the file you gave them and call you for help.

We were much more fortunate. The legislative assistants we met understood what we were about. This was thanks to Egeth who did her homework in targeting offices with an interest and an understanding of health care and mental health issues. Lehrer details the outcomes in his article, but I wanted to mention others as well. A student who attended sent a letter thanking us and saying that he was definitely changing his academic direction to pursue study in applied psychophysiology. A faculty member in attendance later called and asked for someone to come and teach her students about biofeedback.

Two major outcomes we will pursue are developing a consensus conference on biofeedback for incontinence and responding to an invitation to work with the Mental Health Caucus. These are major doors that have been opened for us. It is now up to us to keep the energy alive and positive.

I cannot end this article with just those words. The funding for this project came from your contributions to The Fund for the Future. The fund was started over 15 years ago and is dedicated to supporting efforts to help get biofeedback recognized and adopted and to support research. The money comes from but one source, and that is your contributions. We need your support now more than ever. Please consider sending a check to AAPB now—let’s keep bursting with pride!

—Francine A. Butler

Biofeedback Certification Institute of America News

The Biofeedback Certification Institute of America (BCIA) University Initiative will focus efforts on supporting university-based BCIA certification courses. Input from current university professionals stressed the need for exam updates. As a result, BCIA has hired a consultant to obtain exam questions from university and other professionals for the purposes of certification exam updating.

Final proposals are being reviewed for the new BCIA web site that will be completed this year. It will offer greater usability for both certificants and the general public. BCIA Board members are John Carlson, PhD; Celeste De Bease, PhD; Doug DeGood, PhD; Tamara Dickinson, RN; Karan Kverno, PhD, APRN; Don Moss, PhD; and Randy Nebbett, LPC.

—Celeste De Bease, PhD

Awards Granted at AAPB’s 36th Annual Meeting

At a time when biofeedback, neurofeedback, and other mind-body protocols are gaining strong footholds in the treatment of myriad conditions, AAPB’s 36th Annual Meeting brought the leaders of the field together in Austin, TX, March 31–April 3, 2005, for a remarkable event filled with ground-breaking research, outstanding speakers, comprehensive workshops and symposia, and a variety of networking and learning opportunities for experts and students alike.

In addition to presenting an unparalleled lineup of experts, AAPB took the opportunity to honor colleagues and leaders in the industry with special awards and recognition. The 2005 Distinguished Scientist Award was presented to Paul Lehrer, PhD, in recognition of his work on the landmark study that specifically evaluated the effectiveness of heart rate variability (HRV) biofeedback for asthma. The results indicate that HRV biofeedback may be a useful treatment for asthma. In this study, Lehrer’s team treated asthma conditions with HRV biofeedback, alone or with breath training; patients in the two biofeedback groups showed improved pulmonary function, reduced asthma symptoms, and a reduced need for asthma medication. The HRV biofeedback study was conducted at the psychophysiology laboratory at UMDNJ—Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, Piscataway, NJ, and the private outpatient offices of participating asthma physicians.

Because the growth of the field depends on continuing research and development of students, the importance of education is recognized by AAPB. It was with this in mind that AAPB chose its recipients for the Sheila A. Adler Service Award: Fred Shaffer, PhD, Truman State University; Richard Gevirtz, PhD, Alliant International University—San Diego; and Erik Peper, PhD, San Francisco State University. All three recipients were honored for their commitment to the education and development of future mind-body professionals.

Presidential Recognition citations went to Stephen Stern, from the Stens Corporation, and Seymour Diamond, MD, founder of the Diamond Headache Clinic and the executive chairman of the National Headache...
Foundation. Both Stern and Diamond have contributed greatly to the success of AAPB and the furthering of biofeedback as a treatment modality. A third Presidential Recognition award was given to Jeffrey Cram, PhD, a respected researcher who passed away in early March. Cram’s scientific contributions to surface electromyography (SEMG) helped raise the level of excellence in the field.

AAPB hosted a number of students who attended this meeting with support from the AAPB Foundation student scholarship awards. This year’s student scholarship awards went to the following students: Brady Copeman, Kevin Fink, Jonathon Lecuyer, Ian Lynam, Elizabeth Morgan Canyock, Bryan Sappington, Leslie Sherlin, John Whipple, and Corey White.

A special honor went to Sherlin, who was the winner of the Best Student Paper award for “Low Resolution Electromagnetic Tomography (LORETA) of Monozygotic Twins Discordant for Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.” He was the recipient of a Thought Technology Infiniti System.

Student Web Project on Neurofeedback Wins First Place in Internet Science and Technology Fair Competition

I was culling spam from my inbox one morning last fall when a message from a name I did not recognize almost followed the one from the “Nigerian Minister of Finance” into the trash bin. The subject line read, “Internet Science and Technology Fair,” which sounded more legitimate than the former offer of a discreet financial arrangement, so I took the risk and opened the email.

The message was from Lauren L., a freshman at Lakewood High School in St. Petersburg, FL, who was part of a team of students enrolled in an advanced computer studies class; they were embarking on a project for which they needed a “technical advisor.” They had conducted an Internet search and found my name associated with treatment for attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), the subject of interest for their project. Lauren L. explained that her team was charged with developing a web site as their entry into the Internet Science and Technology Fair (ISTF) competition.

The ISTF is sponsored by the College of Engineering at the University of Central Florida as a means of challenging students to use information technology tools to discover and explore the future of science and engineering. ISTF also provides science, math, and computer teachers with a means to integrate the Internet and research methods into their curricula. Scientists, engineers, clinicians, and other professionals invest their time as technical advisors working as “digital mentors” through ISTF.

The year-long project challenges student teams to research a topic from the U.S. government’s listing of National Critical Technologies (NCT), which includes categories such as energy, environmental quality, information and communication, living systems, manufacturing, materials, and transportation. My team’s interest in ADHD placed them in the living systems category, and ultimately the subcategory, advanced human machine interface—psychophysiology of learning. The project required the team to identify and research a technical application pertinent to their category, which became neurofeedback in the treatment of ADHD.

The Web site development project required Lauren L. and her team members Rachel C., Nancy M., and Drew P. to work within the very specific ISTF content.
guidelines based on national science content standards developed by the American Association for the Advancement of Science. The guidelines defined three specific components of the project, beginning with identifying a problem with social significance (ADHD), reporting on an existing technological solution to the problem (neurofeedback), and finally suggesting an innovation to the technical solution. The students had a deadline for each component to be completed and submitted to ISTF. The process also required them to correspond with experts in the field; Barry Sterman was gracious in responding to the team and providing them inspiration and insight.

Teams published their final research reports in a Web page format that was then judged against other teams from the United States and other participating countries. My team’s project, entitled “ADHD: Worth Paying Attention To” proposes to design an “Awareness Watch” as a portable neurofeedback device, making the technology more accessible and affordable.

I learned from the team through an email with the subject line declaring “...it’s done!” that the completed project was submitted to ISTF in March 2005. In late May 2005 we received notice that their effort won first place among hundreds of submissions from around the world. These very deserving students will receive certificates of award from the National Medal of Technology Program sponsored by the U.S. Department of Commerce. My reward came through experiencing these bright young people drink up whatever knowledge I had to offer them, grow in their respect for scientific inquiry, and creatively apply what they learned with great success. I believe that the lesson for those of us in the field of applied psychophysiology and biofeedback is that participating in mentoring efforts such as the ISTF project sews the seeds of inspiration for subsequent generations of scientists and clinicians who we hope will carry our torch into the future...and perhaps, to be less fearful of our inboxes.

To view the “ADHD: Worth Paying Attention To” Web site, go to http://www.cat.pinellas.k12.fl.us/ISTF/2004%5F2005/04%2D919/, and to learn more about the ISTF, visit their Web site at http://istf.ucf.edu/Newcomers/.

—Aubrey K. Ewing, PhD

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Images from the 36th Annual Meeting in Austin, Texas

Annual Meeting Program Chair Peter Madill is recognized for an outstanding program.

Board Member Naras Bhat, Past-President Lynda Kirk, and Board Member Fred Shaffer are recognized for past service.
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