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SCIENTIFIC ASSESSMENT OF ENERGY MEDICINE PRACTITIONERS

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Abstract

As in all disciplines, common assumptions by practitioners and scientist evaluating those practitioners are made despite the best efforts of those involved. Among the energy medicine practitioner community there is a common belief that no harm can or will be done to the client. Since there are now studies documenting actual physical change as a result of energy medicine practices, we cannot assume that practitioners cannot cause damage. Careful assessment of the practitioner will help the scientist select individuals who are competent in the research environment.

Introduction

It is a common assumption by both practitioners and scientists that the Energy Medicine practitioner can do no harm to the client. Since it has been demonstrated repeatedly that an Energy Medicine practitioner can cause change to physical tissue (Baldwin, 2004, Rubick & Schwartz, 2004, Connor, 2004 a) and to their emotional or spiritual well being (Benor, [2001 (a), (b)], Abbot, 2000, Jonas, 2001), science must also assess whether a negative change may take place.

Practitioner competence is an unresolved issue within the research community. No complete empirical standards have been set. Recommendations made by the Special Report on "Standards for conducting clinical Biofield energy healing research" done by the Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine Supplement (Warber et al. 2003), suggests [a practitioner who has been in practice a minimum of three years be utilized by scientists when performing research on Bioenergy healing. A more substantial set of standards needs to be developed to assess practitioners. There are 122 energy medicine training programs in the US alone (Connor, unpublished). Little research has been done to distinguish characteristics unique to each tradition or school. As a result there are no clear standards of how to assess the competence of a practitioner.

Discussion

There are many healing paradigms available to the consumer of today. Utilization of practitioner offered Bioenergy healing is growing at a tremendous rate, with over 1 million practitioners in the US

alone and over 1 billion dollars which have been spent out of pocket by consumers (estimated). [SOURCE] Bioenergy healers utilize what has been characterized as “vital life force” in traditional literature. It is proposed that this is the force which surrounds and permeates each cell in the body. More current theories of this force suggest the possibility that it is produced as a result of the body being a liquid crystal (Oschman 2003) or in part as a byproduct of the natural metabolic processes of the of the cell producing a type of “chemiluminescence” (Creath & Schwartz, 2004).

Most practitioners in the Bioenergy community feel that they are manipulating or enhancing this vital life force to create greater harmony in the body processes and in the emotional and thought process of the client. There is a growing number of practitioner styles and methods developing within the Bioenergy community, where much spontaneous creation and exploration is ongoing. Traditionally done through the laying-on of hands, it can also be suggested that intentionality, placebo effect and self healing are all part of this paradigm.

In contrast to the many differences in the practitioner community, the research communities' needs are specific. They are:

1. The reliable production and reproduction of energy flow by practitioners.
2. An awareness on the part of practitioners of the energy flow which includes the ability to perceive the process in which they are engaged and articulate that process clearly to scientists.
3. The ability of practitioners to produce consistent, measurable results without drama or excuses.

The last is such an important criterion that I expand on its ramifications here. The ability of the practitioner to limit their emotionality as a factor when involved in the research allows for greater and more specific accuracy and control of the elements being explored by the study. Having practitioners who are “well grounded” or could be termed “level headed” allows the scientist to make the most efficient use of the laboratory time and study dollars. More dramatic practitioners should not be entirely eliminated from studies. They should be utilized as part of the replication process to explore a full range of healing styles. As initial study exploration is done, limiting specific styleistics like drama allows for greater accuracy in the research results. If drama is a factor in quality production of Bioenergy healing then the replication studies will clearly demonstrate that result.

Care should be taken to be sure that practitioners are able to articulate their discomfort if scientist are asking them to perform under controlled conditions which do not correctly explore the question that the scientist is trying to answer. At that point a practitioner should be encouraged to explain the design errors they perceive to the scientists. This would not be considered a dramatic episode and should be considered differently than a practitioner who for example does not like the color of the walls of the laboratory and decides that there is no harmony in the lab because it is not a carpeted floor.

The current standards commonly used by the research community for bioenergy practitioner assessment require a practitioner for research studies who has had a minimum of three years of professional practice at least half time. While this allows exploration of the field with the hope that no information of significance will be dismissed, perhaps a more specific definition or commonly supported method of evaluation could be utilized by the research community to help move the research in the field forward faster. Both speed and accuracy are to be encouraged since bioenergy healing is becoming more and more popular with the general public and researchers These areas are still in the early stages of scientific exploration and public use. However, competent science should not be sacrificed for either speed or accuracy. A clear, coordinated process of study within

the scientific community has historically been shown to enable breakthrough understanding of our world in other areas of scientific enquiry. A precision in identifying procedures in each study so that they can accurately be replicated and the development of a common and comprehensive vocabulary would help in the creation of the coordinated process for bioenergy research. With that as a desired goal, we must first explore what makes a good energy healer.

Key processes that characterize a competent energy practitioner are power, control, and flexibility.

Power comes in two forms or factors. The first power factor is the volume of any particular type of energy current that the practitioners are able to produce. A simple way of assessing this characteristic is for the research scientist to ask, "Do I feel that this practitioner shows any of the following: the practitioner is charismatic, larger than life, takes over a room, is pushy, a presence in a group? If the scientist can answer yes to any of those concepts, further assessment of the practitioner is warranted. Among energy workers a common concept is "the biggest field wins."

The second power factor is self-management. This is the process wherein a practitioner organizes, contains, focuses, motivates and directs the self. It is a process where choice points in the practitioner's behavior are developed and effective and good choices are made by the practitioner. These choices take into consideration the impact of the practitioner's behavior on the self, on others and on the larger community of the earth. Can the practitioner walk her talk? Does the practitioner make eye contact when she speaks with you? Good interpersonal contact skills are necessary for a competent energy medicine practitioner.

When assessing self management the research scientist has many scales and psychological testing instruments available. For example: The Tellegen Absorption Scale (Radtke and Stam, 1991; Dixon, et al, 1996; Finke and MacDonaldd, 1978) , the Positive Mind Scale [(Horowitz et al., 1988)], and Sense of Coherence (Antonofski, 1987) could provide valuable information.

Basic observation on the part of the scientist can always support the assessment process. Is the practitioner making grandiose claims or is he clear in his limitations? It is important to have practitioners who have the ability to describe what they are doing accurately and who also have sufficient security in their skills to say "I don't know," when the limits of their skills are reached.

The ability to observe is as helpful for an energy practitioner who is the subject of research purposes as it is for the research scientist. It supports a practitioner who has developed a desire to improve his skills in finding new techniques and ways of communicating. In addition, it allows the practitioner to tune their skills without judgement so that they develop greater effectiveness and efficacy. Understanding the limits of their skills is part of that observation process. [TRAINED IN WHAT? A trained observer as a subject] is always an asset to the research scientist. Information provided by a trained and accurate observer can be trusted as a more reliable base on which to test bioenergy interventions and it can reduce the time taken to answer research questions. Information which is given that is based in hearsay or mistaken beliefs can lead the scientist in the wrong direction and take additional time to test.

We must continually hold an open mind in doing research. A test to confirm that the practitioner is capable of saying "I do not know" in the research setting could be undertaken. Common among practitioner groups of energy healers is the concept of surrendering to the moment and having no idea what is going to happen or is currently happening in the healing. This is less than a useful position to take while doing research.

Control, the second process, is the ability to put the correct healing frequency, in the correct volume, for the correct period of time, to all of the correct areas. Empirical measurements are still being developed but researchers can check practitioner's potential abilities with some of the following processes. One option is to measure output from the hands of a practitioner with a triaxial extra low

frequency (ELF) field meter (Connor, et al, 2004 b). It would be interesting to verify that the practitioner can produce a frequency and any changes of frequency on demand. We could also explore what frequencies the practitioner produces ([Connor et al, 2004 b)

A second option would be to place the practitioner in a gamma ray detector. Does the level of a ten minute gamma ray output increase when the practitioner starts to allow the energy to flow into a teddy bear or similar object] from a ten minute baseline? Since the mechanisms of action which are potentially at work in bioenergy healing sessions have not yet been delineated, the use of the Teddy Bear eliminates any concerns that a IRB might have using human subjects as bioenergy healing recipients. The teddy bear could have attached to it a piece of paper which states a particular injury or illness to give the Bioenergy practitioner a more natural healing experience.

A third is to verify the practitioner's ability to entrain the clients by measuring EEG for the practitioner and for the client on whom they are working.

While there is insufficient research as yet to confirm that any of these abilities correspond to the ability of a practitioner to produce change in a client, accumulated information from the research community would be able to refute or potentially confirm an empirical process of assessment.

Flexibility, the third process, is the ability of the practitioner to change working styles and techniques to suit the needs of the client. Even in a practice such as Reiki, where standard hand positions are taught, an experienced and flexible practitioner will change the length of time spent at a particular hand position based on the clients' needs. Flexibility in a practitioner of another tradition may mean a choice between a shamanic journey for the client or a simple energy healing. It also translates to the ability of the practitioner to be comfortable with appropriate change. Constant [complaints by practitioners that are inappropriate] would not be suggestive of a capable practitioner. For example: a practitioner's complaint that the clients on whom they have been selected to work are not "good people to work on," is not supportive of the research process. Particularly when the scientist has selected the client subjects with great care. Watching the practitioner do several sessions on pre-selected clients with differing issues can give the practitioner the opportunity to demonstrate flexibility to the research scientist.

Frequency flexibility is a criterion that can also be applied to the members of a particular style of energy work. If for example, only a few members of a community of energy practitioners agree to be tested and the majority of the members of their community insist that no further testing is necessary, it presents a situation where the practitioner community is defining research protocols rather than opening themselves to be fully and comprehensively tested. Since the research scientist is ultimately responsible for the quality of information presented to the world at large, promoting practitioners as competent when untested is unethical. Exploration with a different group of practitioners, who are willing to be individually tested, would be an option.

Greater power, control and flexibility come as products of greater experience. A practitioner who is in at least a half time professional practice for a minimum of ten years may provide the research community with more reliable results than a practitioner who has practiced a shorter duration. It is sometimes suggested within the energy medicine community that it takes a minimum of ten years to make a competent practitioner.

To fully test the complex process of healing, the most capable and accurate of the practitioner group need to set the standards for those that follow. As we explore the range and experience of the human healing process we will begin to define factors that support healing in greater detail. In addition, we will be exploring what are the best and most positive characteristics of the practitioner. Practitioners in general seek to expand their skills and improve their abilities to support others that are on healing journeys. Greater understanding of what those skills, abilities and characteristics

should be is another possible goal for the scientist. The use of a capable and accurate practitioner allows for more aspects to be clearly identified and the development of a comprehensive understanding of what makes a good bioenergy healer to be evolved. Those with more skill, developed through greater and more complete experience, can support science more accurately.

Summary

As the research community continues to grow and resolve some of the many issues raised, new and innovative solutions will become more obvious. As additional research is done in the basic sciences of Energy Medicine, a greater understanding of how best to assess this complex and integrated form for supporting the healing process will undoubtedly evolve. Clarifying issues through discussion within our larger scientific community will continue to shed light on the dynamic and growing understanding of the human healing process. In the intervening period, assessing practitioners for power, control and flexibility will help to create a minimum level of quality for the practitioners who are being assessed.

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