



Practice opportunities in biofeedback

By Harry L. Campbell

Psychologists are perfectly positioned to take advantage of biofeedback technology to bring excitement, new clients and additional revenue into their practices. They have a good understanding of the mind/body connection, the effects of stress on the nervous system and behavior modification.

Psychologists spend much of their time talking to and listening to their clients. Much of this time may be spent convincing clients of things they need to change. It can be difficult to get someone to change something that they cannot see. Biofeedback is a tool to help people see things that are not obvious to them.

What is biofeedback?

Biofeedback uses computerized technology to help learn to control or manage stress responses. Sensitive instruments measure physical processes and "feed back" the information to an individual in order to control these processes.

Biofeedback allows clients to see the results of interventions such as guided imagery, progressive muscle relaxation and diaphragmatic breathing.

Clinical applications

Anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and panic attack all are related to an overactive autonomic nervous system. What is going on in the mind is affecting the body. The overactive nervous system also affects the mind. It can become a cycle that feeds upon itself.

Biofeedback provides a way to quantify what the nervous system is doing and how what you teach your clients changes the state of the nervous system. It is much easier for a person to

learn to change the state of their nervous system when they have sensitive information on how it is reacting or responding. With these stress disorders we commonly use skin temperature, skin conductance (sweat), heart rate/heart rate variability and respiration biofeedback.

Chronic pain is often related to excess, chronic muscular contraction. This is why muscle relaxant medications are often prescribed for pain. Clients suffering from chronic pain are often unaware that they are contracting muscles as much as they are. EMG biofeedback can be used to quickly show a person an exact measurement of their level of muscle contraction. They can then learn to release the tension through this feedback combined with techniques such as progressive muscle relaxation.

Insomnia, ADD/ADHD and Traumatic Brain Injury usually involve interrupted patterns in brain activity. EEG biofeedback or neurofeedback detects and gives feedback on the amplitude of the various electrical frequencies including Delta, Theta, Alpha and Beta as well as other measures like coherence. This can help the brain to regulate and return to a more normal pattern, usually improving symptoms.

Some psychologists have already been incorporating biofeedback into their work. It is still often a challenge for clients to find a provider who offers biofeedback services. Some insurance companies reimburse for biofeedback under CPT code 90901, 90875 or 90876. Some will cover it under other codes.

Another growing area of biofeedback for psychologists is the area of non-clinical applications. This is great for

several reasons. First it can help to increase the amount of a practice that does not rely on insurance reimbursement. Second, it can give the practitioner stress relief by allowing him or her to work with some people who are not suffering from a clinical disorder. Helping people perform better can be enjoyable.

Some of the non-clinical applications are sports performance, business performance, music, dance and acting performance, fear of flying, fear of public speaking, academic/ test anxiety and improving focus. With these applications biofeedback can help clients learn to calm their autonomic nervous system, improve their muscle control and increase their mental focus so that they can improve their performance. Biofeedback can improve performance, decrease injuries, decrease absenteeism and reduce health care costs.

Biofeedback is an area that can add new life, enjoyment and revenue into a psychology practice. It can also bring faster results with many clients.

Harry L. Campbell is president of Biofeedback Resources International Corp. www.biofeedbackinternational.com and has been involved in biofeedback since 1985. He has trained hundreds of professionals in biofeedback and the use of biofeedback equipment including programs for the Veterans Administration and the U.S. military. His email is Harry@biofeedbackinternational.com.

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