Biofeedback Certification Institute of America Goes Global

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As biofeedback and neurofeedback achieve greater worldwide recognition, there is increased demand for international education and training standards. This article discusses the promise of international biofeedback and neurofeedback, challenges to the growth of international certification, and the Biofeedback Certification Institute of America initiatives to eliminate the obstacles to both U.S. and international certification.

Biofeedback and neurofeedback are increasingly popular topics in the mainstream media, from the optimal performance training of Olympic athletes to the treatment of soldiers with traumatic brain injury. Ian Wickramakera’s message of “skills not pills” may become more persuasive as drug co-pays increase and public confidence in medication safety is shaken by reports of serious side effects. The military has significantly expanded funding for biofeedback and neurofeedback services, and more universities provide this training in their student wellness centers. There has been an explosion in the number of consumer products that teach the concept of self-regulation. The next generation of videogames promises to include biometric controllers that will monitor signals such as the electroencephalogram (EEG) to direct game play.

Because consumers frequently have to pay for our services out of pocket because of limited insurance coverage, they are rightfully concerned about how to select a qualified provider. Biofeedback and neurofeedback professionals, in turn, seek Biofeedback Certification Institute of America (BCIA) certification to demonstrate their competence in an increasingly competitive marketplace. Our certification numbers are growing both in the United States and internationally. Increased global recognition of BCIA certification is a testament to our high education and training standards and increased recognition of the legitimacy of our field.

We have been impressed by the professionalism of our international certificants. Many have overcome multiple challenges such as the limited availability of didactic courses and mentorship opportunities, prohibitive travel expenses, poor compensation for their clinical services, and equipment costs that may be two to three times higher than in the United States. Despite these hurdles, they have chosen the BCIA credential because it is the international gold standard for biofeedback and neurofeedback certification.

Many of our best instructors, such as Erik Peper, Lynda and Michael Thompson, and John Demos, have taken their didactic programs abroad and have also provided distance mentoring. BCIA now has strong certificants in Austria, Canada, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, and South Africa. From what we have heard, Poland and Sweden may be next. We expect these new certificants to produce the first generation of homegrown BCIA blueprint teachers and mentors.

The University Initiative, which promotes the creation of biofeedback and neurofeedback courses at universities, has been an important part of our global outreach. We are proud of the first BCIA-accredited neurofeedback curriculum offered entirely in French. This course is offered at the Institut de Neurofeedback du Quebec by Vincent Paquette and Johanne Levesque. We are equally proud that Monika Fuhs at Sigmund Freud University of Vienna now offers biofeedback and neurofeedback courses based on the BCIA blueprints. Both universities have chosen student completion of BCIA certification as a program objective.

The Biofeedback Foundation of Europe (BFE) is one of the few international biofeedback organizations that offers coursework as well as a gathering place to network and
exchange ideas at their annual meeting. The Foundation’s advisory board is composed of leading clinicians and researchers from multiple disciplines who share a common interest in the dissemination of information about our rapidly growing field. Many countries are represented, including Austria, Germany, Greece, Israel, the Netherlands, and Poland. BCIA has staffed a booth at BFE for the past 2 years. We look forward to maintaining our presence at this meeting and even offering a proctored exam in the future.

The Japanese Society of Biofeedback Research was founded in 1973 with a distinguished history of biofeedback research. The organization represents the medical, engineering, and psychology/education fields. We are proud to welcome into BCIA some of this organization’s finest clinicians, who were originally certified through their own society.

In addition, there are biofeedback and neurofeedback associations in Austria, the Baltic States, New Zealand, and Switzerland. As our field grows, these organizations should expand, resulting in greater opportunities for collaboration. BCIA is working hard to eliminate obstacles to both U.S. and international certification. We have made considerable progress in promoting distance learning and distance mentoring and in providing online access to continuing education and testing.

**Distance Education**

We are proud of the distance education programs that teach didactic coursework based on our Blueprint of Knowledge. There are three distance-based didactic programs for General Biofeedback, two for Neurofeedback, and one for Pelvic Muscle Dysfunction Biofeedback. We encourage more universities and accredited vendors to offer training programs that fulfill our didactic education requirements. This will increase the number of certificants and help professionals to maintain and enhance their skills.

**Distance Mentoring**

Distance mentoring has nearly eliminated the challenge of finding a qualified professional to supervise the learning of personal self-regulation and clinical skills. Many of our mentors successfully use Internet-based technologies such as Skype® and Go To Meeting® to demonstrate and directly observe skills such as electrode placement and identification of artifact. Current technology allows our professionals to view a candidate’s screen, observe clinical technique using a Webcam, and demonstrate biofeedback program features on the candidate’s own computer. Expected technological advances, such as increased bandwidth and faster graphics-processing speeds, should expand the availability and richness of distance mentoring.

**Online Continuing Education and Teleseminars**

Previously, several national and international professionals did not pursue BCIA certification or maintain their certification because of the limited availability and cost of continuing education coursework. In September 2009, the BCIA Board launched affordable online continuing education in collaboration with the Association for Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback (AAPB) and the International Society for Neurofeedback and Research. We selected seminal articles from Biofeedback Magazine, Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback, and the Journal of Neurotherapy that are available online and then developed brief online tests that cover their main learning objectives. To reduce your expenses, we selected articles that are free to the public as well as those that are free only to subscribers, and we will charge only a minimal fee for online testing. Please visit the recertification area under the Certificants Only section of the BCIA Web site at www.bcia.org to read more about this option.

AAPB’s Teleseminar series provides another affordable continuing education option. These innovative 90- to 120-minute educational programs allow certificants to obtain 1.5 to 2 hours of accredited, Category A continuing education from the comfort of their home or office. These two online options allow our certificants to fulfill their continuing education requirement toward recertification without the added travel expense and inconvenience of closing one’s practice.

**Online Testing**

We are pleased to announce the first generation of BCIA online exams. This process started slowly with the introduction of the human anatomy/physiology exam as an alternative to completing a semester anatomy/physiology course. Based on our experience with this first online exam, we launched online exams for all three certification programs. As of August 2009, we had successfully offered online exams in Mexico and South Africa, with many more to come. Secure online testing has benefited both our American and international colleagues by eliminating their travel costs, making it easier to arrange for exam proctoring, and significantly reducing their special exam fee.

**The Next Challenge**

What is the next major challenge for international certification? In the future, we would like to translate our
exams into our applicants’ native languages. This step will not be practical until our core reading lists are available in these languages and there is sufficient demand for these tests. We are hopeful that new translation products will become available in the next decade so that our certification will truly become a credential without walls.

We are excited by the potential for international growth in general biofeedback, neurofeedback, and pelvic muscle dysfunction biofeedback. BCIA certification can help promote this development by providing an international standard for didactic education and training in these areas. We are encouraged by the number of international universities that have developed courses based on our Blueprints and that expect their graduates to demonstrate their competence by achieving BCIA certification, so that they will be “More than qualified—BCIA Certified!”

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