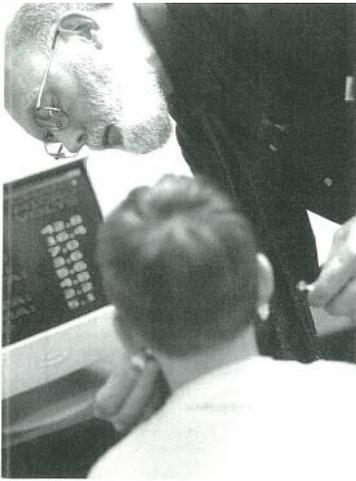


Brain Wave

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by Rob Howatson



He is an end-of-the-road practitioner. Doctors send him the patients who aren't responding to conventional treatments – which makes for an interesting waiting room tableau – the autistic teen next to the performance optimizing CEO next to the guy with the closed head injury next to the empty chair vacated by the hyperactive kid. They await their turn with Paul Swingle, one of only three registered neurotherapists in the Lower Mainland. (His daughter, Mari, is one of the other two and works alongside him in their Melville Street clinic.)

The Swingles helps people train their brains to function smoothly. They do this with an electroencephalogram (EEG), first mapping the patient's brain to spot irregularities and then teaching that person to modulate their own brainwaves using various neurofeedback techniques. In the case of kids with attention deficit disorder (ADD) – a big chunk of the doctor's clientele – Swingle has them play a computer game using only their minds. No joystick, just electrodes on the patient's scalp. Every time the child gets his brain to pump out more concentration-enhancing beta waves, an on-screen basketball player sinks a jump shot. It's the kind of self-regulation Swingle says can accomplish a lot.

"One child came to us as a non-reader and within six months had caught up to his Grade 3 peers," says the former University of Ottawa prof who grew "tired of walking on ice" and came west in '97 to fill the empty neuro niche.

He is working on a book about neurofeedback called *Biofeedback for the Brain* and hopes that next year it will appear on shelves alongside other literature from this still very alternative field, including Dr. Robert Hill's *Getting Rid of Ritalin: How Neurofeedback Can Successfully Treat Attention Deficit Disorder Without Drugs*.

"A lot of neurotherapists are pushing this idea [that our EEG-based techniques will supplant Ritalin]," explains Swingle. "The hurdle we face is not science; it is politics. A ton of gold is worth \$7.2 million the last time I calculated it; a ton of Ritalin is worth somewhere in order of \$26 million. "It disgusts him the way some communities have become rife with this particular psychoactive drug. He says it is absolutely disgraceful that we've become intolerant of children's behaviour and have resorted to sedating them.

As for people sceptical about his treatments, he invites them to come in for a brain mapping. Without telling him anything about themselves, he claims the EEG can reveal impulse control problems, sleep disorders, predisposition to depression, inability to organize and stay on target, general anxiety, poor stress tolerance, predisposition to addictive behaviour, past trauma and artistic tendencies.

"When I've passed their test, then they bring their child to me for mine"