Creating Our Future

Michael G. McKee
Cleveland Clinic Foundation

The evolving health-care system in the United States increasingly rewards successful efforts to keep people healthier and more productive. This is exactly what applied psychophysiology and biofeedback have to offer. However, if we wait to be included in the system, we will wait forever. Inclusion can only come as a result of our efforts to educate decision-makers about the value of our research and services. That education won’t take place unless we have an instructional plan and materials. Detailing that plan and producing those materials is the immediate challenge to this Association.

Descriptor Key Words: health-care systems; applied psychophysiology; clinical effectiveness; cost effectiveness; biofeedback.

This presidential address featured my Rorschach tie. Reading inkblots has seemed the challenge for many of us who are working to create our future. It has been hard to find a destination, a route, a map. In this strange world what’s called health-care reform often seems to mean dismantling of effective health-care systems and denial of delivery of services. What’s called health-care reform often means cutting funds for research to improve the health of the American people.

It’s a world in which we, the AAPB members, offer research and services to give the American public, government, and business what everybody wants: cost-effective ways to be healthier, happier, and more productive.

Dr. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) spoke eloquently at this meeting of “flow.” Clear goals, constantly changing the match of challenge and skills,
 immediate and relevant feedback, and a process of passive volition rather than active striving— the conditions for flow are those for a biofeedback session.

In process as well as outcome, we offer good things. In communicating that and building a future, we've tried to construct a map and a guidebook outlining who we are and where we're going. Yet, in wandering through the mazes of government, insurance companies, regulatory bodies, allied associations, it's often felt as if the map we were following was the one found in one of Lewis Carroll's (1876, Annotated version, 1981) famous allegories, *The Hunting of the Snark*:

Other maps are such shapes with their islands and capes, but we've got our brave captain to thank. So the crew would protest that he's brought us the best, a perfect and absolute blank!

In creating our future, the first question is, Where do we want to go? What's our destination? The answers that many of you sent in response to the question, "What will our field look like in 2020?", helped provide answers about our destination. Many of you spoke of the ubiquitous presence of equipment, miniaturized equipment worn by people in daily life, at home, in the workplace, in school, equipment that would have built-in devices to tell you whether the signal you were getting was accurate. You spoke of equipment and practitioners being in front-line primary practice offices so that the millions of stress-related disorders that plague our population were addressed immediately and effectively.

Once we create a destination, the next question is, How do we get there? The answer is through difficult territory. It has often looked to me like alligator swamps and unscaleable cliffs. It is territory characterized by aspects of life that used to be antithetical to me— health-care systems, economics, marketing, politics. The acronym for that is HEMP, and I like to conceptualize the HEMP as a rope which we can use to swing across the swamps or to scale the heights, but often we've felt rope burns from being tied up with it, or else feared we were about to be strung up by it.

Once we know the destination and the territory, we knock on the many doors of gatekeepers to research funding and delivery of services. As we knock, they say, "Who's there?" "Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback," we answer. And what do they say? It varies greatly, but sometimes they say, "Who? Who are you?" Which defines another task in creating our future. We must communicate who we are. Michael Zey said in his 1994 book, *Seizing the Future*, "Biofeedback is perhaps the least understood of all the human frontiers technology. However, the principle first uncovered by psychologist Neal Miller in the 1940s has been creating a