



Shifting the Paradigm for Biofield Science and Healing

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Over the last year, with the goal of advancing biofield science and the practice of healing, the Consciousness and Healing Initiative, with the support of Jeff Walker, Tom Dingleline, Jason Yotopoulos and the Emerald Gate Foundation, embarked on the Systems Mapping for Healing Evolution project. The project aimed to contribute to the science and practice of healing, with an emphasis on the growing body of knowledge about biofield and subtle energy healing. A systems change approach was taken that involved gathering together data from practitioners, scientific research, researchers, device manufacturers, stakeholders and potential funders involved in this area, which we have presented in a publicly available report linked here: <https://www.chi.is/systems-mapping-resources/>.*

Systems change is an intentional process designed to alter the status quo by shifting the function or structure of a system with purposeful interventions intended to alter underlying structures and processes. When systems change, paradigms shift. Policies, cultural routines, relationships, resources, power structures and values change — often irreversibly. World history has seen several dramatic paradigms shift where advances in science and technology synergized with systemic changes across society. Advances in electromagnetic and quantum theories in the late 19th and early 20th centuries contributed one such shift, where scientific theories crumbled and were replaced, belief systems changed and new technologies emerged to accompany a new and different way of life.

Today, there are signs of a similar paradigm shift in views on the nature of healing. Research and new technologies continue to be developed and a variety of traditional healing practices are now in common use. Advances in a wide range of scientific disciplines (such as biophysics, biology, functional genomics, neuroscience, psychology and psychoneuroimmunology), have begun to emphasize the importance of information in the natural processes of life. These results provide a new viewpoint on the subtle system of 'biofield' interactions that organize biological processes from the subatomic, atomic, molecular, cellular, organismic, to the interpersonal, cultural and cosmic levels.^{1,2} Biofield interactions have been suggested to operate via well-understood mechanisms of biological chemistry, low-energy nonthermal electromagnetic fields (EMFs) or subtle energy processes, quantum behaviors related to consciousness, nonlocality and causality, and perhaps other means not presently well-understood.² In short, the previous, primarily reductive-materialist, scientific view is giving way to a systems-oriented viewpoint emphasizing information, complexity, interdependence, culture and consciousness.

Alongside these scientific advances, the integration of biofield-based practices such as Reiki, Qigong and Acupuncture into clinical use has brought traditional perspectives into mainstream medical culture and scientific discourse.³ Informed by the cosmologies of indigenous traditions from which they emerged, biofield and subtle energy healing practices describe an interconnected world, using concepts of subtle energies



such as Qi, Prana that bears strong resemblance with advances in contemporary sciences described above.⁴

The Systems Mapping for Healing Evolution project* gathered information from across the landscape associated with the science and practice of healing, producing databases and summaries: <https://www.chi.is/systems-mapping-resources/>*

Peer Reviewed Publications – over 6,000 peer-reviewed publications related to biofield healing science, 350 of which are human clinical studies.

Researchers – 400+ researchers actively participating in and/or keenly interested in pursuing biofield science research worldwide.

Devices – over 250 prominent subtle energy biofield devices currently marketed — devices categorized according to mode of action, available scientific literature, regulatory position. This information is available to the public (on the link in the first paragraph of this article).

Practitioners – we contacted about 3 dozen regarded healers from diverse traditions and to date have conducted 15 in-depth interviews with these healers.

Stakeholders – the project interviewed stakeholders — 60 people representing policy, education, community, practice, research, technology, funding; 15 of those interviewed were active researchers.

This large and diverse body of information* offers a systems view on biofield science and healing, reflecting the multiple perspectives taken by researchers, practitioners, device manufacturers and stakeholders. Certainly, many paths forward are suggested by this broad dataset and here are some key takeaways from the project:

The research database, compiled using the keyword search described in the report,* shows:

- A large body of anthropological and sociological research that considers indigenous biofield therapies.
- A substantial proportion of articles published are narrative reviews focused on theory and scientific hypothesizes about the biofield and subtle energy.

- Studies on practitioner perspectives often consider biofield therapies.
- Some biofield-relevant research articles published by mainstream researchers do not use terms such as ‘biofield’ or ‘subtle energy.’
- There is a growing body of work emerging, mostly from Asia, considering treatments based upon Traditional Chinese Medicine concepts of biofields.

350 human clinical studies were identified, reflecting a broad diversity of study designs and types and healing studied. Some common themes emerging from this survey were:

- The most commonly studied biofield therapies were Energy Psychology, Therapeutic Touch and Reiki.
- Numerous clinical trials have been performed outside the US, especially in the last 5 years (substantial international interest, often in indigenous practices).
- Healer perspectives are often not integrated with study designs.
- More adequately powered clinical studies are warranted in several areas, including pain, trauma and cancer.

While the large number of published papers holds promise, the Systems Mapping for Healing Evolution project* produced a system-wide survey of this diverse body of research and did not assess the quality of studies. Research to date consists of a diversity of both controlled and uncontrolled study designs. Considering this diversity, a clear view of the state of the scientific evidence requires evidence mapping and systematic assessment study quality, methodology and clinical results.

The project also conducted a survey of prominent biofield devices, defined as devices best understood from a biofield viewpoint.² The survey shows that a large number and variety of biofield devices are now marketed to the public, with claims to both diagnose (detect biofield activity) and heal (by modifying biofield activity). The substantial majority of the devices summarized in the devices database do not have peer-reviewed scientific support and have not been independently assessed for safety, efficacy or reliability. Manufacturers’ claims, which are often anecdotal,



unproven and sometimes pseudoscientific, are the dominant, and often the only, sources of information available to the public about particular devices. As a result, the public currently has few sources of reliable and scientifically validated information regarding the safety, efficacy, reliability and appropriate uses for many devices. Some devices claim to evaluate biofields for diagnoses and others deliver electric currents, electromagnetic fields, pulsations of light and sound, purported subtle energies, etc., for which both the benefits and dangers have not been clearly established. A clear need thus exists for impartial evaluation of many devices claiming to interact with biofields, coupled with a means for making this information readily available to the public.

Interviews were conducted with healing practitioners and research scientists with an active interest and engagement in biofield science and healing. Interviews and feedback from healing practitioners showed that there are a variety of approaches that healers utilize when both sensing and working with the human biofield for healing — for example, multi-layered field vs. unified field, seeing the field vs. feeling the field, utilizing hands-on, hands-off, distance techniques. There appears to be some consensus around descriptions of what “healing” is (e.g., a multi-leveled return to the soul, Source, Spirit, purpose) and distinguishing this from “curing” terminology and diagnostic terms. Healers also note the need to discuss and co-develop research protocols with scientists, and have suggested that promising directions for research in clinical populations include acute conditions including trauma and pain, fertility and somatic disorders with immune/hormonal components that are often considered “mystery” illnesses in Western medicine. Healers also anecdotally report many successes, but the published data found in our databases generally does not refer to these reports.

We also interviewed scientists actively working either directly in, or in areas related to, biofield healing. Interestingly, many researchers report being interested in biofield science due to personal experiences they deemed worthy of research. Another common theme from these interviews was the need to bridge the gap between the language of academic science and imprecisely defined ‘jargon’ often used to describe biofields and healing. Coupled with this, there are social barriers

that limit the impact of biofield science; for example, mainstream researchers have reported they conduct or contribute to research in biofield science but do not publish it or openly discuss this research with colleagues. Many meditation and Integrative Medicine researchers are interested in biofield concepts and measurements to provide a more holistic understanding of their work. An almost universal comment is that funding is a primary driver of progress.

The Systems Mapping for Healing Evolution project* took a systems-wide approach to biofield science and healing, revealing a large and diverse set of practices, research and devices. This broad view of biofield science and healing suggests a number of next steps across several disciplines, including organizing and understanding the state of the science/evidence, identifying gaps and points of promise in research, better communicating the results to the public, assessing mechanisms and devices claiming to measure or enhance biofield interactions. Cultivation of a community of practitioners, researchers and stakeholders to develop research methods better informed by indigenous wisdom and 1st-person healer perspectives holds promise for a deeper understanding of the nature of the human biofield and of healing itself. We thank all who participated and hope that the results of this project contribute to systems change — reducing suffering for all by enhancing our innate ability to heal. €



Read more on the full report at

<https://www.chi.is/systems-mapping-resources/>

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