EXTENDING THE SPIRITUAL HEALING PARADIGM TO EXPLORE DISTANT MENTAL INTERACTION EFFECTS WITH WICCAN HEALERS

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Objectives: We proposed to build on the findings of a meta-analysis of published randomised control clinical trials (RCTs) that test for effects of noncontact healing, which recommended that future studies should ensure that designs are tailored to the specific claims of practising healers to ensure that they retain ecological validity. To demonstrate how that could be achieved, this project consisted of interviews with practising Pagan healers to explore their modus operandi with the intention of using insights to inform the design of a controlled experiment.

Method: Phase 0 is completed and consisted of a meta-analysis of extant non-contact healing studies (Roe et al., 2015). Phase 1 is completed and is being prepared for publication. It consists of in-depth analysis of interviews with Pagan healers in order to map their understanding of the healing process. Phase 2 is ongoing and consists of a double blind RCT of noncontact healing whose design incorporates findings from the interview phase. This study has ethical approval and is underway as a collection of small n iterations over 18 months. Participants are in general good health. A Pagan healer never meets the participants but is provided with a personal object from each and a short account of how they hope to benefit from participation. In each cohort participants are randomly allocated to Group A or B and receives healing intention in the week between T₀-T₁ and T₁-T₂ respectively. The whole cohort meets weekly to complete wellbeing measures and to share a focusing / meditation exercise. We expect to complete data collection by June 2016, as per our proposed schedule.

Preliminary Results: Preliminary results from Phase 1 (interviews) have been presented at conferences in 2015, and a 33,000-word thesis chapter describing the outcomes has been produced. Primary themes include: balance between adhering to tradition and personalising of practice; ethical considerations in what represents an appropriate outcome; the importance of belief and intention, and the role of ritual; and the relationship between practice and one's understanding of the energetic/spiritual nature of humankind and its implications for the causes of illness and wellbeing. Phase 2 is ongoing.

Conclusions: Conclusions will be drawn on completion of Phase 2.

Publications:

