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Clinical Research in the Effects of Rolfing

As many Rolfers may remember, formal research to establish the physiologic basis of the functional and structural changes which can be observed as a result of Rolfing was of primary interest to Dr. Rolf. Some research has been done as long as ten years ago, but there is a need for more.

In the fall of 1980, Dean and Laurie Rollings decided to promote research into the effects of Rolfing. Concurrently, they established a research organization called Aspen Research Institute (ARI) with a broader scope; to carry out research in the natural sciences. ARI started on three research projects; the effects of low-frequency electromagnetic radiation on humans, the mechanism of communication among Dolphins, and on the efficacy of Rolfing. To execute this latter project, the ARI, in early 1981, commissioned Dr. Julian Silverman to design a protocol for research on Rolfing, and concurrently to serve as a management consultant to the Board of Directors of the Rolf Institute. (Financial support for his role as a management consultant switched from ARI to the Rolf Institute in 1982 and judging by what we heard at the recent annual meeting this work is having a significant impact on the organization and work of the Board.) Julian spent the best part of nine months developing a research protocol embellished by a rationale for some of the choices he made. The measurements he suggested are focused on the principles of wholeness in function and structure--the essence of Rolfing. He finished this document in September 1981.

In the meantime, other members of ARI looked at other possible applications of this type of research. They reasoned that if we could develop the methods to measure objectively the changes in overall human performance we could assess the effects not

only of Rolfing, but the effects of other health interventions, be they exercise, or diet, or other manipulative interventions such as Osteopathic or Chiropractic manipulations, or Feldenchrist's work, etc., or perhaps even the effects of aging. An idea emerged whereby a superset of the measurements which Julian had enumerated could be put together into what we would call a "Performance Lab." We might then develop a prototype performance lab which could be duplicated and sold, or perhaps marketed as a service to any group interested in evaluating health performance, or health related interventions. Indeed, one might be able to determine which interventions are most appropriate for which individual.

While Julian was completing his protocol for research on Rolfing, ARI got a group of biomedical scientists together for two days to see what characteristics should be measured for the more global concept--the performance lab. Perhaps the most interesting result of these two days was that there was no consensus as to a limited set of meaningful measurements for performance. This left us with a long list of parameters to measure and the problem that measurement and processing for a large number of parameters becomes unrealistically expensive and becomes an excessive burden on the person whose performance is being measured. On the other hand, at this time, it is not clear which few measurements are truly indicative of overall well being or performance, or how many of the parameters considered, correlate to each other. All of this suggests there is a need for research and development on how to build a performance lab.

In the fall of 1981, ARI set out to find funds to proceed with the development of a Performance Lab reasoning that when the lab itself was developed one purpose it could have is the independent evaluation of the efficacy of Rolfing. These studies

would be used as scientific evidence of useful change in human performance to demonstrate to potential clients, referring physicians, and insurance companies the value of Rolfing. Among other things that one might look at is whether or not certain types of individuals get more change and benefit from Rolfing than other types of individuals.

The Performance Lab was estimated to cost in the neighborhood of \$300,000 - \$500,000, depending on several options. The high price also reflects the need to conduct research and development on the Lab itself. Early attempts at fund raising were unsuccessful, and indeed, ARI discovered it takes money in the form of payments to fund raisers, to raise funds. The Board of Directors of the Rolf Institute was approached in the winter of 1981-1982 for funds to be used to solicit further funds for the development of the lab on the basis that the Institute would share in a commercial enterprise in which use of the Lab by other groups as well as the Rolf Institute would provide a return on the investment. The Board agreed to raise these funds but somehow this activity got side-tracked and no funds were forthcoming. By the spring of 1982, ARI decided to put aside its plans for further development of a performance lab, and decided instead to present the protocol which was more Rolfing specific, the one Julian had developed, to the Rolf Institute, as an unconditional gift, in a form which could be used to raise funds specifically for research on Rolfing.

This proposal, which we will send to the Rolf Institute in October, specifies the details of the measurements to be made and the methods to be used, and names an individual capable, qualified, and interested in conducting this research. ARI hopes the Rolf Institute effects these scientific studies which can then be used as further evidence of the value of Rolfing.