Cogmed's response to the NewYorker.com blog post of April 5, 2013

Comment / Letter to the Editor posted on April 9, 2013

When we at Cogmed were contacted for an interview for Gareth Cook's April 5th article, "Brain Games are Bogus," we responded enthusiastically, pleased that a prestigious publication, such as "The New Yorker," was developing a story on the growing science of neuroplasticity. However, the article that was published takes an unfair and unbalanced swipe at Cogmed. The Cogmed team and I spent significant time and energy providing Mr. Cook with background for his article, which was almost completely ignored.

We agree wholeheartedly with Mr. Cook's assertion that there is "powerful, widely accepted evidence that working memory plays an important role in everything from reading ability and problem-solving to reasoning and learning new skills." Improved working memory is precisely what the research on Cogmed demonstrates. We do not, as Mr. Cook suggests, claim that Cogmed improves intelligence. Rather, by improving working memory, an individual's capacity for learning can be increased.

Though we provided Mr. Cook with copies of many of the 31 peer-reviewed studies on Cogmed (www.cogmed.com/research) that have been published in prestigious scientific journals, such as "Science" and "Developmental Psychology," he chose not to include any of them in his article. For example, researchers, who were unaware of whether children with ADHD had received Cogmed training or a placebo, found significantly improved on task behavior (a crucial ability for classroom success) in the Cogmed group (Green et al., 2012). Improvements in attentive behavior in daily life also were evidenced in two additional randomized, placebo controlled, studies (Klingberg et al., 2005; Brehmer et al., 2012). Making no reference to any of these studies, Mr. Cook chose to exclusively cite two studies critical of working memory training, one of which was a meta-analysis where the vast majority of the studies included were unrelated to Cogmed.

Independent leaders in the field of working memory research refer to Cogmed as a "promising intervention" (Shah et al., 2012) and cite Cogmed research as "honest and scientifically rigorous" (Morrison & Chein, 2012). There is also a robust body of clinical evidence backing the efficacy of Cogmed. Hundreds of mental health professionals in more than 30 countries have observed significant improvements in working memory and decreases in inattentive behavior in their clients. Mr. Cook, however, does not appear to have consulted with any of these experts or to have spoken with any Cogmed practitioners or their clients. Their perspective on Cogmed is entirely absent from this article.

We acknowledge that there are legitimate questions about the extent to which Cogmed Working Memory Training affects attentional, behavioral, and academic performance in individuals from across the developmental spectrum. After all, the science of neuroplasticity is still young and there is more research to be done. We are actively working with a large group of independent researchers (there are more than 60 projects currently underway) and school research partners
in the spirit of open inquiry to further the state of the science. Our mission is to positively impact the lives of millions of individuals suffering from working memory deficits. I urge the readers of the "New Yorker" to get the whole story about Cogmed Working Memory Training and to come to their own conclusions about its efficacy.

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Pearson