

Therapeutic Touch: Fifth Force or Myth?

Eugenie Vorburger Mielczarek

Alternative Medicine's intrusion into science-based medicine fractures our medical care. A recent article in the Health section of the *Washington Post* and information from its reporter cited a paper in the *Journal of Orthopaedic Research* claiming the ability of Therapeutic Touch (TT) practitioners to control the growth, *in vitro*, of healthy and cancerous bone cells. Therapeutic Touch depends upon the general public's misunderstanding of energy fields, and their need for medical mythology, to facilitate its expanding use among medical institutions.

Eugenie Vorburger Mielczarek is Emeritus Professor of Physics at George Mason. Her experimental researches in materials science, chemical physics and biological physics have been published in *Physical Review*, *Journal of Chemical Physics* and *Biology of Metals*. She has been a visiting scientist at the National Institutes of Health, and a visiting Professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She is a recipient of the Distinguished Faculty Award at George Mason University. Mielczarek has advised National Public Radio, judged the U. S. Steel-American Institute of Physics prize for science journalism, and written book reviews for *Physics Today*. She was the primary editor of *Key Papers in Biological Physics* and author

of *Iron, Nature's Universal Element: Why People Need Iron & Animals Make Magnets*, a popular science book. Her most recent article was a review of research frontiers linking Physics and Biology.

Saturday, May 9, 2009

1:30 pm

Bethesda Library

7400 Arlington Road

Bethesda, MD

(Near Bethesda metro)

FREE admission – Everyone welcome, members and non-members

Parking at the library is free, but you must enter your parking space number into a kiosk in the lobby. Parking is validated for two hours. Patrons can extend parking for an additional two hours by re-punching their number at the kiosk.

For more information, call the 24-hour NCAS Skeptic Line recording at 301-587-3827.
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National Capital Area Skeptics Public Lecture Series


20/20 SINCE 1987



Torn From Today's Headlines


A front-page article in the March 17 Health section of the *Washington Post* (<http://preview.tinyurl.com/defund-nccam>) focused on a recent proposal submitted by some scientists at [Change.gov](http://change.gov) (the “citizen’s briefing book” solicited by the Obama Transition Team to allow the public to share their expertise and insight with the incoming president, to be considered while he crafts and enacts policies) to de-fund the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) and the Office of Cancer Complementary and Alternative Medicine (OCCAM) at the National Institutes of Health. Quoted is Steven Salzberg, a genome researcher and computational biologist at the University of Maryland: “With a new administration, and President Obama’s stated goal of moving science to the forefront, now is the time for scientists to start speaking up about issues that concern us.” Salzberg’s proposal would increase biomedical research funding to NIH without affecting its overall budget by reallocating NCCAM and OCCAM funding, which totals about \$242 million, to other NIH institutes and centers.

Salzberg’s blog (genome.fieldofscience.com) notes that NCCAM was “created not by scientists, who never thought it was a good idea, but by Congress, and specifically by just two congressmen in the 1990s who believed in particular ‘alternative’ (but scientifically dubious) treatments... Defunding NCCAM would also provide a direct societal benefit. Practitioners of so-called ‘alternative’ medicines constantly refer to NIH’s support as a way of validating their practices and beliefs, most of which are not supported by evidence... Any legitimate, promising medical treatment can be funded by one of the existing NIH institutes. There’s no need for a separate center for ‘alternative’ therapies—but what has happened is that NCCAM has become a last refuge for poorly designed, unscientific studies that couldn’t get funded through the normal peer-reviewed process.”


Dr. Salzberg’s November 2008 NCAS lecture on “Autism & Vaccines: How Bad Science Confuses the Press & Harms the Public,” is available at the NCAS YouTube channel, YouTube.com/NCASVideo. 

2009 NCAS Philip J. Klass Award Presentation

Also available at the NCAS YouTube channel is the presentation of the 2009 NCAS Philip J. Klass Award to Paul Kurtz, widely considered the father of the modern scientific skeptical movement. NCAS President Scott Snell and Professor Kurtz spoke in front of an audience of more than 220 from all over the world, including Klass Laureates James Randi and Bob

Park, during the Center For Inquiry’s 12th World Congress in Bethesda, Maryland on April 10, 2009. Visit <http://preview.tinyurl.com/d5txyb> to read the award dedication and a transcript of Snell’s remarks, and to see photos. 

June Social

NCAS will hold a social gathering for members, prospective members, and friends on Saturday, June 20 at 6:30 p.m. at the home of Curtis Haymore by Lake Barcroft in Northern Virginia. The address is 6334 Lakeview Drive, Falls Church, VA 22041. Lake Barcroft is a well-established lake with lots of wildlife. You are certain to see Canadian Geese, Great Blue Herons, and several kinds of ducks. Some of the wildlife on the lake is shown at the following link, <http://preview.tinyurl.com/LakeBarcroft>, and at Curtis’ web site via <http://preview.tinyurl.com/LakeBarcroft2>. We will begin our lake cruise at 7 p.m. BYOB; some snacks will be provided. PLEASE RSVP SO WE KNOW HOW MANY WILL BE COMING! RSVP to curtishaymore@mac.com and he will send you detailed directions. You can call Curtis at 571-435-3767 if you have any questions. 


Drinking Sceptically

On Wednesday, May 13, come to Jackie’s Restaurant at 8081 Georgia Avenue in Silver Spring at 7:00 p.m. to join fellow NCASers for the next DC-area *Drinking Sceptically* event. *Drinking Sceptically* is an informal social event designed to promote fellowship and networking among skeptics, critical-thinkers, and like-minded individuals.

Don’t drink? Don’t let that stop you from joining us! Some of the world’s most famous skeptics are teetotalers, and we are happy to have you!

ncas.org/ds-ncas.html
www.jackiesrestaurant.com
www.drinkingsceptically.org

There’s no cover charge, and if you order from their very reasonably-priced menu, you’ll be delighted. (January’s *Washingtonian* magazine rated Jackie’s #78 of all DC-area restaurants.)

Remember that drinking sceptically means drinking responsibly. If there’s one thing science has taught us, it’s the effects of alcohol on the human body. 

Shadow on Vacation Until September

Our next *Shadow* will be out in September. In the meantime, mark your calendars for *Drinking Sceptically* on June 10, July 8, August 12, and September 9. We will see you at 7 p.m. at Jackie’s Restaurant on the second Wednesday of each month! 