



The Newsletter of The North Texas Skeptics

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In this month's issue:

- [Quack: NTS does TT](#)
- [North Texas Skeptics at TWU Health Check 2001](#)
- [The State of the Skeptic Nation](#)
- [What's new](#)

Quack: NTS does TT

by John Blanton

Flash news announcement. NTS scrapes the bottom of the barrel.

We've done creationism, we've done Holocaust revisionism, and we've done clustered water. Sooner or later we were bound to do therapeutic touch (TT). Now we have.

Lu Ann Wahl was in for the April program to tell us about this latest in a long line of medical quacks. For a quick introduction to TT go to Stephen Barrett's Quackwatch site at

<http://www.quackwatch.com/01QuackeryRelatedTopics/tt.html>:

Therapeutic Touch was conceived in the early 1970s by Dolores Krieger, Ph.D., R.N., a faculty member at New York University's Division of Nursing. The "human energy field" TT theorists postulate resembles the "magnetic fluid" or "magnetic force" hypothesized during the 18th century by Anton Mesmer and his followers [1]. Mesmerism held that illnesses are caused by obstacles to the free flow of this fluid and that skilled healers ("sensitives") could remove these obstacles by making passes with their hands. Some aspects of mesmerism were revived in the nineteenth century by Theosophy, an occult religion that incorporated Eastern metaphysical concepts and underlies many current "New Age" ideas. Dora Kunz, who is considered TT's co-developer, was president of the Theosophical Society of America from 1975 to 1987. She collaborated with Krieger on the early TT studies and claims to be a fifth-generation "sensitive" and a "gifted healer."

Apparently TT hasn't gotten any better since then.

Lu Ann Wahl is a registered nurse (RN) with a private practice incorporating TT. Since being introduced to TT she has become convinced of its power and effectiveness. Like most other believers, she sees TT in the context of an "energy field" associated with the body. TT practitioners claim to manipulate this field with their hands (causing some to see TT as nothing but a bunch of hand waving). An additional claim is the ability to detect the body's "energy field" with the hands. Lu Ann even pointed out that the "energy field" can be seen by some people as an "aura."

Regarding the ability to detect the body's "energy field" with the hands, this idea was roundly debunked in an article published in the April 1, 1998, issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA). School girl Emily Rosa (whose mother is a skeptic) conducted a test of 21 TT practitioners who claimed to be able to detect the "energy field." They scored about what would be expected from chance. Here are two useful URLs for those interested in following up:

<http://talentdevelop.com/Page122.html>

<http://www.eclericon.net/CatEcumen/touch.html>

Lu Ann and other TT advocates have responded to such tests in a manner that should by now be familiar to skeptics. They claim that a positive attitude is required for success. When a skeptic tests TT it's bound to fail. Another refrain is akin to "Just like everything else, sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't."

We were not surprised that Lu Ann sprinkled her presentation with a number of scientific terms, of which she knew little or nothing. Besides "energy" (not to mention "field") she threw out "non-local" and "electromagnetic radiation." I don't know what she had in mind by "non-local," but in quantum mechanics the term refers to the peculiar correspondence between the actions of physically separated physical systems. Quantum mechanics and particularly non-local action at a distance are often invoked by proponents of psychic phenomena. Rather than go into this subject let me just refer you to some references. Start at —

<http://home.earthlink.net/~johnfblanton/physics/physics.htm>

— and follow the links related to "EPR."

Lu Ann apologized for misusing the scientific terminology when we pointed this out to her and conceded such usage was meant to be metaphorical. I suggested that patients might misunderstand her and think she was using these terms as they are commonly understood. If deliberate, such misuse of scientific terminology might constitute deception.

She has provided us with additional documentation along with the e-mail address of "Healing Touch Research Director for Healing Touch International," Diane Wardell, at DWardell@son1.nur.uth.tmc.edu. I am posting the additional documentation on our Web site [here](#).

Lu Ann concluded by demonstrating the practice of TT (which paradoxically does not necessarily involve touching). A number of our members volunteered to be subjects in order to encounter TT close up. I will finish up with Laura Ainsworth's impressions from the session:

The presentation on Saturday was really quite amusing if you could forget that nurses are practicing this technique and reciting this gobbledygook in hospitals.

During the break, I asked Lu Ann to do her therapeutic "touch" on me, since I was going to have to leave in about ten minutes. Privately, I was conducting a test of sorts.

I sat in a chair, and she began "feeling" my "egg" (aura/personal space). The correct comments she made about my personality could definitely have been inferred by my manner of dress and various nonverbal and verbal cues I'd given while she was present. Other comments she made were wrong. She is clearly sensitive to personal "vibes" (I'll refrain from use of the word "energy"), and that's an invaluable ability for a nurse, but there was nothing to suggest anything spiritual or supernatural was involved.

She moved her hands closer to feel "heat" from particular areas, so that she might sense any problematic site. Her hands skimmed over my head and upper body, then came to rest around the groin area. She sensed a great deal of "heat" and even mentioned possible sexual abuse in my past. (El wrongo.) I gave her no clue as to her accuracy. Then she said it could be in the future as well. I said, "How can you tell this is going to happen in the future?" She didn't say. She continued over the rest of my body.

I realize that Lu Ann was not there to be tested or to conduct a parlor trick, but she missed something really big. If she's sensing vibrations at all, I don't see how it's possible for her to miss the pressure and tinnitus from my Meniere's disease. This is present to some degree in my left ear all the time and was quite pronounced that afternoon. Since my balance was not affected, however, it was impossible for her to observe the problem visually. Of all the ailments she might be able to "feel" with this skill she claims to have, I'd think this would be just about the easiest. She missed it completely.

Lu Ann probably doesn't realize that she's using cold reading technique to learn about her subject. I gave her nothing. It would've been interesting to point her down a totally false path with my verbal responses and see what corresponding problems she might "feel" with her hands. Guess I'm too nice.

Before I left, I talked with her about her problem of mixing science with metaphor and faith. She uses science as a touchstone to give her claims an air of legitimacy, but when she gets an inconvenient science-oriented question she can't answer, she tries to backtrack into New Age thought.

She can't have it both ways. I said she needs to present her technique as a matter of faith and not try to back it up with science, because to do so is inaccurate. She did tell me she would stop doing it. She's a lovely person who could do good work (really healing people) if she'd embrace scientific fact instead of contorting it to suit her belief system.



Laura Ainsworth gets in contact with TT practitioner Lu Ann Wahl. Photo by John Blanton



NTS Vice President Danny Barnett enjoys the wonders of therapeutic touch. Patients do not normally wear a hat during treatment. Photo by John Blanton

[\[Back to top\]](#)

North Texas Skeptics at TWU Health Check 2001

By Daniel R. Barnett

On April 4, 2001, the North Texas Skeptics staffed a table at the Health Check 2001 expo at Texas Woman's University in Denton. The expo, which ran on April 3-4, featured various organizations and practitioners who offered pamphlets and free medical screenings to attendees.

NTS President Curtis Severns, Vice-president Daniel Barnett, and Secretary John Blanton were on-hand to offer newsletters and information to folks who attended Health Check 2001. We were invited to participate by Heather Matthies, one of the expo's organizers, to whom we are very grateful. Matthies, who was once trained in various alternative medical disciplines such as Reiki and Therapeutic Touch, eventually developed a skeptical response to such practices.

Knowing that the North Texas Skeptics advocate a thorough examination of any new or controversial medical therapy, Matthies invited our organization to come and help counterbalance unproven alternative treatments, which had made a strong showing at the previous Health Check. Apparently, there were a few too many health benefits being attributed to aromatherapy last year, and someone was even pitching a homeopathic medication as a cure for certain cancers.

Although we didn't see anything that blatant at this year's Health Check, we did see three or four chiropractic kiosks at Health Check 2001. One of them, Family Chiropractic Center of Denton, set up shop across the hall from our booth. Curtis was able to get a good look at one of the practitioners from FCC, who was also a kinesiologist. He'd stimulate acupuncture points on women using a laser pointer, press down on an arm to see how the whole body reacted, and so on. We'll admit that we hadn't boned up much on kinesiology at that point, but we weren't exactly convinced by his therapeutics. He drew a pretty good crowd, though.

Fortunately, we received a lot of interest as well, along with a new subscriber to our monthly newsletter (thank you!). The NTS table featured various back issues of our newsletter, especially those with health-related articles dealing with "energized water," veterinary homeopathy, and more. We also set up a small display of alternative medicines from the past and present, including a trace mineral supplement that supposedly enhances psychic capabilities and a 100-year-old bottle of Clark Stanley's Snake Oil Liniment – complete with label and contents.

Some of the folks who visited our table had some interesting questions for us – and some startled reactions when they realized what was in the medicine bottles we had on display. One thing we've noticed is that there's still a certain amount of confusion among the general public concerning alternative medicine. One woman asked what our objections to homeopathy were, explaining that she had thought homeopathy encompassed the use of nutritional supplements as a whole. We were happy to explain to her the differences between homeopathy, herbalism, and nutritional therapy. She seemed to appreciate it greatly.

After all the visitors, the questions, the free food, and the kinesiology demonstrations, how did we rate our appearance at TWU? Looks like we did okay. Hopefully we gave a lot of students and visitors a better look at how skeptics react to alternative medicine. As far as health-related issues go, we don't want to automatically dismiss every new medical notion or theory that comes our way. We at the North Texas Skeptics are interested in empowering individuals with the information they need to make rational and informed choices about their health care.

Hopefully, by appearing at Health Check 2001 and other similar health expos in the future, we'll be able to do just that.



NTS President and VP Curtis Severns and Danny Barnett at the only skeptical table. Shown also is our hostess Heather Matthies. Did we mention that TWU is a women's school? Photo by John Blanton

[\[Back to top\]](#)

The State of the Skeptic Nation

by Curtis Severns, President of the North Texas Skeptics

The Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) recently celebrated their 25th anniversary by inviting many of their leaders and longtime fellows to speak at a banquet. In honor of the anniversary CSICOP has renewed their effort to help promote local skeptic groups like ours. To that end CSICOP invited one leader from each of the local groups in North America to attend a brain storming session leading up to the anniversary party. As the President of the North Texas Skeptics, I would like to say I felt obligated to represent our organization. The truth is, I saw it as a chance to mingle with the best and brightest of the skeptic world.

The focus of the weekend session was to share ideas and concerns among the different groups, and how each could work together to further our missions. The sessions and the banquet took place at CSICOP's Center for Inquiry in Amherst, NY. The weekend started out with a little site-seeing at Niagara Falls with Keith Taylor, President of the San Diego Association for Rational Inquiry (SDARI) and his wife. Keith is a former stand-up comedian so the laughs kept coming. Later a large group met at the hotel and went to dinner. The CSICOP meeting was not to start till Saturday morning.

Friday evening ended with the fulfillment of a prediction made by our very own John Blanton. It's a good thing he is an NTS member, making him ineligible to win our \$10,000 [paranormal challenge](#). John somehow predicted I would end up in Hooters with Bela Scheiber, our CSICOP host, eating chicken wings. Now

how did he know that? Did he know Hooters was next to our hotel? Bela is the Groups Liaison for CSICOP, and President of the Rocky Mountain Skeptics. Some of our most productive brain storming happened at Hooters. Of course the "wings" may have dulled my senses.

The session officially started Saturday morning with a talk by Joe Nickell, CSICOP senior research fellow. You may know Joe from one of his many TV appearances. One of the main attractions at the Center for Inquiry is Joe's office, which is decorated by many "artifacts" from Joe's paranormal investigations. One of the themes of Joe's talk was the difference between a "top down" and "bottom up" approach to membership organizations like ours. The "top down" approach consists of focused recruiting of better qualified speakers, writers and leaders. The quality of the presentations and articles will in turn attract the skeptical enthusiasts like myself. The "bottom up" approach is an all out membership campaign. The large group will in turn attract more members, and better qualified speakers and authors. It has been a while since we have held a membership drive of any sort. To make up for lost time, my plan is to focus on both approaches.

The remainder of the weekend leading up to the anniversary banquet on Sunday entailed the participants' coming up with the major topics which concerned our various groups. The major themes included the following:

- How can we use the Internet more effectively?
- How can CSICOP best assist the groups?
- How can the groups work together more effectively?
- How can we grow our groups more efficiently?
- How can we promote our groups better?

There were more than 20 groups represented, spanning from coast to coast and from Canada to South America. Bela had us break up into small groups, each tackling a topic in which we had experience. I joined the Internet group. We discussed expanding e-mail lists to carry on the brain storming session. A few group leaders had already started such a list and keep in contact regularly. We have now added all the conference participants and are in the process of adding a representative from each of the groups who couldn't make it. We also decided we need a central skeptic's news database that all of the groups could maintain and benefit from. Preferably the database could be accessed seamlessly from our various websites. We decided the same idea could be done with links, searches and newsletter archives. The hope is that sites like skepticnews.com and skepticplanet.com could become central databases which each group could integrate into their own sites as they chose. This is a complicated goal but one well worth pursuing. CSICOP officials expressed the interest in hosting the newsletter archives and to start a syndicate for sharing newsletter articles.

After our small group sessions we all returned with our suggestions. Our group reported first, followed by the others. It quickly became apparent that the major focus would be an international membership organization which would unite the various groups. There were many concerns about liability and keeping the groups autonomous. Paul Kurtz, Chairman, and Barry Karr, Executive Director of CSICOP, having gone through several lawsuits, are adamant about not taking on the liability of the members. Most of the participants seemed to agree that an international membership organization would be a key factor in promoting the popularity of skepticism groups and that it would be pursued with or without CSICOP on board. CSICOP agreed to put together a proposal and share it with each of the group leaders for discussion. As a group we also decided to meet again soon in congress, with the aim of officially chartering a new international organization. It's tentatively planned to precede the CSICOP conference in Atlanta in November. The details will be hashed out by e-mail and announced as they become available.

Some of the other ideas put forward by the different committees included everything from how to attract media attention to how to motivate active members. There are so many ideas I came away from the conference with that I could never list them all here. I will just say that you can expect many changes here at NTS and throughout the skeptic world. We are discussing changes in our meeting times, our meeting place, membership campaigns, speaker recruitment, skeptic awards, contests, etc.

My hope is that all of you will see the positive changes taking place and feel the drive to step in and be a part of it. The complaint heard most often at the conference is that our groups are run by one or two dedicated individuals and getting volunteer help was like pulling teeth. The same is true for our group. Until now John Blanton has been working on pulling my teeth and those of others for quite a while. If you're interested in helping out just start showing up at our meetings, including the social dinner, and pitch in where you feel you can help. If you're like many of us and can't give time, then give an extra donation above your membership dues. We need pledges to help fund a membership drive, speaker honorariums, science fair awards, high school writing contests, investigations, etc. We are on the leading wave of a flood of rational thinking. Come be a part of it.



CSICOP 25th Anniversary Cake
Photo by Curtis Severns



Convening at Hooters
Photo by Curtis Severns



Joe Nickell
Photo by Curtis Severns



Bela Scheiber, our host, speaking to the conference
Photo by Curtis Severns

[\[Back to top\]](#)

What's new

by **Robert Park**

[Robert Park publishes the What's New column at <http://www.qps.org/WN/>. Following are some clippings of interest.]

Mars: Maybe it's time they looked at a different rock.

It was August of 1996. Congress was finishing up the appropriation process. NASA called a press conference to announce the results of an analysis of a meteorite found in Antarctica that was believed to have come from Mars. The study team claimed to have found fossil evidence of Martian life in the rock (WN 9 Aug 96). By the time the appropriation process was complete, there was a scientific consensus that the features were not from organic processes (WN 27 Dec 96). Analysis of the rock, however, went on. Now, five years later, NASA reports chains of magnetite crystals in the rock that might suggest a biological origin. This new discovery coincides with an intense lobbying campaign by space romantics in the Mars Society (WN 21 Aug 98), who hope to persuade the new administration to commit to human exploration and settlement of the red planet.

Yeah, sure. But maybe it wouldn't hurt to have a robot fetch a fresh Mars sample first.

Censoring Darwin: Arkansas is expected to try again.

The House Committee on State Agencies and Governmental Affairs of the Arkansas legislature has forwarded a measure to the full House that would bar mention of evolution or radio-carbon dating from state funded textbooks. The committee vote came exactly 20 years after the Arkansas legislature passed a similar law, which was subsequently ruled unconstitutional by the US Supreme Court. In spite of the growing conservatism of the Court, there is little reason to suppose this measure would fare any better.

[Editor's note: The bill was defeated on the floor. Representative Jim Holt vows to try again.]

EMF and cancer: Touched by an angel?

Consumer groups and politicians in Rome have charged that the likely cause of a cancer cluster around the Vatican is a high-powered radio transmission tower used by the Church to spread the holy word.

Science advice: Bush reactivates PCAST.

Every day lately, a new rumor pops up about who will be chosen to be Science Advisor, based, it seems, on a steady stream of scientists invited to meet with the President. Although George W. still doesn't have a science advisor, this week he brought back PCAST, the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology, created by his father in 1990. Don't look for a bunch of academic scientists; the co-chair of the new PCAST is Floyd Kvamme, a Silicon Valley venture capitalist. The other co-chair will be the White House Science Advisor, assuming one is finally named.

Polygraphs: Maybe a science advisor could take a look at this.

When it was discovered that a spy for Russia had held a sensitive position in the FBI for years, it was clear that strong measures were needed to prevent this from ever happening again. The solution? Give polygraph tests to 500 FBI employees. "We have no choice," an FBI spokesman explained. Meanwhile, scientists at Sandia Labs are boycotting polygraph exams, because they believe questions about their health and medications violate privacy rights. But why is no one focusing on whether the polygraph works? So far, no spy has ever been unmasked by the polygraph.

Oxygenated water: Why not, it works fine for cod fish?

The New York Times last Saturday ran an article on oxygenated water. The Times was apparently unaware of the Vitamin "O" history. The Vitamin "O" scam was first exposed by What's New (WN 17 Nov 00). The Federal Trade Commission charged that health claims for Vitamin "O" were fraudulent (WN 19 Mar 99), and the maker was fined \$375K (WN 5 May 00). Nevertheless, attracted by the huge mark up, the number of oxygenated-water scams has actually been proliferating. Professional sports teams are particularly vulnerable. The result must be a lot of toilet breaks. By our calculation, an athlete would need a liter of the water every 25 seconds to get a 1% oxygen boost. Even that assumes claims of enhanced solubility are true, which they aren't, and the oxygen finds its way into the blood stream instead of the bladder. What ever happened to investigative reporting at the New York Times?

Cold fusion: Maybe one more study will clear things up.

Or maybe not. We hear often these days from cold fusion believers about the great progress that has been made in cold fusion. We will hear it again on April 30, at the APS meeting. This week, WN received a long report from the Naval Research Laboratory. It was dated March 26, 2001, just three days after the anniversary of the 1989 cold fusion press conference in Salt Lake City. The report was about a Pons and Fleischmann kind of experiment: an "open" electrolysis study of excess heat in the electrolysis of heavy water, using a Pd-B alloy cathode. One of the authors is none other than Martin Fleischmann. How appropriate. Twelve years ago at this time, the news was about the unreliability of closed calorimetry experiments. Twelve years later, cold fusion research is still struggling with the same point. Progress?

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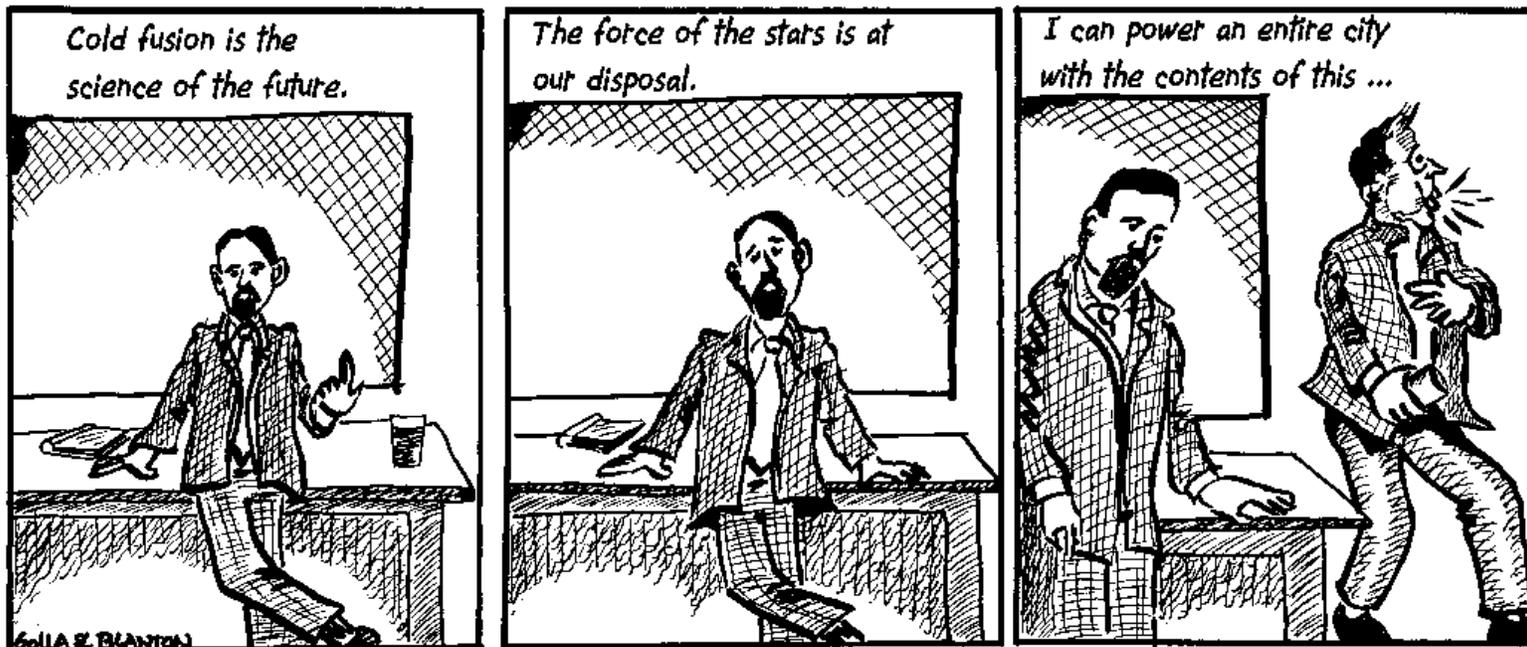
[\[Back to top\]](#)

Skeptical ink

By Prasad Golla and John Blanton

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[\[Back to top\]](#)