

**Alternative Medicine**  
**A Conversation & Cuisine Evening**

**Facilitated by Dónal O'Mathúna (domathuna2@hotmail.com)**

## Alternative Medicine

### 1. What is alternative medicine?

Other names (with somewhat different connotations): unorthodox medicine, complementary medicine, unconventional medicine, holistic medicine, marginal medicine, irregular medicine, fringe medicine, New Age medicine, planet medicine, and medical quackery.

### 2. Some common elements in the variety of alternative medicines

#### a. View of Modern Medicine

“Conventional medicine has always put its emphasis on crisis intervention, and that is where it is most successful. It is what you want when they haul you in from a car wreck, . . . What physicians are far less successful at is telling you how to stay healthy or what to do about the multitude of ailments that do not strike as a sudden crisis but sneak up and refuse to go away” (Claudia Wallis, “Why New Age Medicine Is Catching On,” *Time* (Nov 4 1991): 69).

“A century of medical progress has left people with the idea that for every ailment there must be a cure: somehow, somewhere, if only you look hard enough or pay enough . . .” (Bruce G. Charlton, “Philosophy of medicine: alternative or scientific?” *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 85 (August 1992): 387).

#### b. c. Human Energy Fields

“Therapeutic Touch postulates that in a healthy person there’s an equilibrium between inward and outward energy flow. For practitioners of therapeutic touch, illness is an imbalance in this energy field or a disruption in the energy flow.” (Rochelle B. Mackey, “Discover the Healing Power of Therapeutic Touch,” *American Journal of Nursing* (April 1995): 27.)

This life-energy is called *prana* in India. “What is universally agreed on is that the more Prana you have, the more vital your mental and bodily processes. . . . Deplete Prana is directly linked to aging and death.” (Deepak Chopra, *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind: The Quantum Alternative to Growing Old* (New York: Harmony Books, 1993), 262.)

#### c. View of Science

Janet Quinn, a leading promoter of Therapeutic Touch, stated: “We don’t have empirical data to demonstrate the existence of a personal energy field. It’s a working hypothesis. In science, you’re allowed to do that.” (Leon Jaroff, “A No-Touch Therapy,” *Time* (November 21, 1994): 89.)

“I had been led to the supposition that reason, logic, and common-sense interpretation of the obvious are the prevalent modes of human thought in America. . . . But what I discovered in interactions with the proponents of “alternative” health care were some different thought processes. They had, to me, a remarkably alien perception of science and the world.” (Faith T. Fitzgerald, “Science and Scam: Alternative Thought Patterns in Alternative Health Care,” *New England Journal of Medicine* 309 (October 1983): 1066.)

### **3. Why is alternative medicine gaining in popularity?**

#### a. Medical Reasons

“The reason people go to nonethical practitioners is simple: they want to feel better. Access is easy. Invitations to be healed are everywhere. It’s cheaper than seeing a physician.” (Edward W. Campion, “Why Unconventional Medicine?” *New England Journal of Medicine* 328 (January 1993): 282-3.)

“The Gerson Therapy is a state of the art, contemporary, holistic and natural treatment which utilizes the body’s own healing mechanism in the treatment and cure of chronic debilitating illness.” (Gerson Therapy promotional literature, p. 2.)

The World Health Organization defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being.”

#### b. Social issues

“As a group, the [Baby] boomers have always had something of an authority problem (think sit-ins, sexual revolution). With health care as with everything else, they want to be involved in the decision making. They want lots of attention. They want to take charge.” (Wallis, *Time*, 69-70).

Therapeutic Touch should be accepted as a way to “celebrate the diversity among us.” (Lynda Juall Carpenito, *Nursing Diagnosis: Application to Clinical Practice*, 6th ed. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1995), 356.)

“Remember . . . Good Health is Your Choice.”<sup>TM</sup> (Dr. David J. Pesek, Clinical Nutritionist, Iridologist, Psychotherapist.)

#### c. Spiritual Reasons

“Inside every person is a god in embryo. . . . The human mind is literally infinite. . . . Once you have the deepest insight--*I am the universe*--nature can deny you nothing!” (Deepak Chopra, outside cover for audio-cassette tape series.)

“Having studied alternative healthcare up close since 1989, I believe that to overlook or downgrade its religious undercurrent is a disservice to the public.” (Jack Raso, “Chasing Shadows on a Pitch-Black Wall,” *Skeptic* 3 (Winter 1995): 60.)

“It would be equally foolish, however, to ignore the fact that tens of thousands of middle-class Americans have turned to alternative healing systems less out of medical desperation than out of spiritual hunger.” (Robert C. Fuller, “The Turn to Alternative Medicine,” *Second Opinion* 18 (July 1992): 23).

### **4. Why would anyone be concerned about alternative medicine?**

“Many advocates of unproven treatments and cures contend that people have the right to try whatever may offer them hope, even if others believe the remedy is worthless. This argument is especially strong for people with AIDS or other life-threatening diseases with no know cure.” (Isadora B. Stehlin, “An FDA Guide to Choosing Medical Treatments,” *FDA Consumer* (June 1995): 10.)

“The public is at a major disadvantage when faced with false and unproven remedies in books, magazines and newspaper articles, lectures, audio and video cassettes, talk show appearances, etc.” (William T. Jarvis, “Quackery: A National Scandal,” *Clinical Chemistry* 38 (1992): 1574)



### a. Should We Test Therapies? Why and How?

“Therapeutic Touch works. . . . You can do it; everyone who is willing to undertake the discipline to learn Therapeutic Touch can do it. You need only try in order to determine the truth of this statement for yourself. So, I invite you: TRY.” (Dolores Krieger, *Accepting Your Power to Heal: The Personal Practice of Therapeutic Touch* (Santa Fe, NM: Bear & Company, 1993), 8.)

“Therapeutic Touch is rooted in Eastern philosophy. Because of our Western culture orientation, we search for research to explain its effects. To the Eastern mind, if it works, one does not need research to prove how it works. The Eastern mind does not care how it works, only that it does.” (Carpenito’s *Nursing Diagnosis*, 356)

“This committee found that the scientific rationale for TT is not established and indeed can be questioned in several areas. . . . There is not a sufficient body of data, both in quality and quantity, to establish TT as a unique and efficacious healing modality.” (H. N. Claman, *Report of the Chancellor’s Committee on Therapeutic Touch* (Denver: University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, 1994, 3, 6).

### b. Are these practices religious or not? Does it matter?

Referring to Therapeutic Touch: “The context in which it’s performed isn’t religious.” (Mackey, *AJN*, 27.)

“Therapeutic touch does not have a religious base.” (L. A. Thelan et al., *Textbook of Critical Care Nursing* (St. Louis: Mosby, 1994), 894.

“Krieger admits there is a high occult factor or an element of the para-normal in how TT works, but she is quick to point out this type of healing may well be the wave of the future.” Robert Calvert, “Dolores Krieger, Ph.D. and her Therapeutic Touch,” interview in *Massage* (January/February 1994): 57.

“According to judicial interpretation, the term religious includes the new age philosophy and new age training programs. Although, new age consultants and employers argue such training programs are not religious, the courts will likely hold otherwise. Most new age training courses are derived from Eastern religions, such as Buddhism and Hinduism.” (Thomas D. Brierton, “Employers’ New Age Training Programs Fail to Alter the Consciousness of the EEOC,” *Labor Law Journal* (July 1992): 419-20.)