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# Trends. Alternative Therapies and Resistance to Disconfirming Information in Security Bureaucracies: Perspective of a Fourth Grader

Editor

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A fourth-grade student from Colorado designed an experiment for her school's science fair that assessed a crucial element of an alternative medical therapy called therapeutic touch. The therapy is founded on the premise that healers can sense something called the human energy field by passing their hands over a patient's body without touching the patient. The fourth grader devised a simple test for sensing the human energy field and found that--whatever this field might be--practitioners of therapeutic touch performed at levels that would be expected only through chance.

Are practitioners of therapeutic touch going out of business? Are they applauding her efforts? No: they are attacking the nature of the experiment as irrelevant or extremely biased.

Is such hubris, corruption, or defensiveness isolated among practitioners of the alternative therapies? Far from it. An exhaustingly comprehensive study on child and adolescent mental health and substance abuse studies focusing on state-of-the-art practices and principles found that the latter were more expensive and no more effective than more common practices. Has this study--which before implementation was hailed as a definitive attempt to assess clinical outcome--led to significant changes in how optimal child and adolescent care is conceived and practiced? No: the study and its authors have been roundly attacked.

Is such hubris, corruption, or defensiveness isolated within the health field? No: bad news based on definitive analytic methods often is discounted or resisted within international security bureaucracies. The purveyors of bad news often formally or informally punished. Self-censorship, groupthink-like "mind guards," corrupt institutional politics, and low morale increase within the bureaucracy. An example might include the Israeli continuation with the policy of assassination even if the political consequences of completed assassinations seems to have no effect or even a harmful effect on foreign threats to the country. Another example might include the United States Government's (USG) impeding of efforts to prevent genocide in Rwanda even with accurate predictions of violence developed by the USG's own Intelligence Community.

Too often components of bureaucracies and the people in them don't want to hear the truth. Those who do often suffer noxious consequences. This is especially the case among bureaucracies and people who mouth the platitudes of honesty and integrity. Those who take the terms seriously and act on them are punished. Those who view them as cover for reinforcing a party line regardless of truth advance. Over and over again, the enemy turns out to be us. (See Adler, P.S., & Borys, B. (1996). Two types of bureaucracy: Enabling and coercive. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 41, 61-89; Bickman, L. (1996). A continuum of care. *American Psychologist*, 51, 689-701; Boje, D.M., Rosile, G.A., Dennehy, R., & Summers, D.J. (1997). Restorying reengineering: Some deconstructions and postmodern alternatives. *Communication Research*, 24, 631-668; Kolata, G. (April 1, 1998). 4th grader challenges alternative therapy. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Melman, Y. (March 25, 1998). Israel's darkest secrets. *The New York Times*, p. A23; Weiner, T. (March 26, 1998). Critics say U.S. ignored C.I.A.

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warnings of genocide in Rwanda. The New York Times, <http://www.nytimes.com>.) (Keywords: Alternative Medicine, Evidence, Mental Health, Therapeutic Touch, Truth.)