

## **An Emerging Health Crisis -- Where's Dr. House When You Need Him?**

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Needham, MA (PRWEB) May 19, 2005 -- If it weren't so tragic, it could be the story line in a Stephen King novel. Each day the National Pediculosis Association (NPA) is contacted by individuals describing the torment and horror of oozing skin lesions, sensations of bugs biting and crawling under their skin and doctors who diagnose it as nothing more than a delusion.

In a 1994 Ladies Home Journal article about children who suffered seizures after being exposed to Lindane, a treatment for lice and scabies, the NPA provided a toll free number to launch the first national reporting registry for lice and scabies outbreaks, product failure, and adverse reactions to treatments. Adverse reaction reports to the NPA registry about Lindane led to the FDA giving Lindane a black box and its strongest warning. The NPA registry available at [www.headlice.org](http://www.headlice.org) also provided the earliest reports of head lice having developed resistance to the most widely used pediculicides.

However, almost as soon as the NPA's registry was launched, reports of a bizarre health problem began to surface. Individuals reported biting and crawling sensations -- symptoms for which they could find no explanation and assumed were related to lice and scabies. But such symptoms were inconsistent with lice or scabies, signaling a very different problem.

The compelling nature of the reports prompted the NPA to contact the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in 1995 and on numerous occasions thereafter. Deborah Z. Altschuler, NPA's president says the CDC as an agency has not shared the NPA's concern.

Unable to find any studies where such a population had their skin assessed in a single site clinical setting, the NPA in 2000 conducted its own clinical research in conjunction with the Oklahoma State Department of Health. The research identified Collembola (also known as springtail) in 18 of the 20 participants. According to Stephen Hopkin, author of The Biology of Springtails, Collembola are among the most widespread and abundant terrestrial arthropods. Collembola can be large enough to be seen on the backside of a leaf, but also minute enough to require the use of a microscope. The majority of them feed on fungal hyphae or decaying plant material, but they can also feast off of each other. Known mainly as soil-dwellers, they can swarm and aggregate in the millions. Referred to as decomposers, their primary function is to break down organic matter.

The report on the NPA research was published in the Journal of the New York Entomological Society in the spring of 2004. (<http://www.headlice.org/news/2004/pr071204.htm>)

The report spoke to the challenges of the trailblazing research and demonstrated how easy it had been for these minute arthropods to remain overlooked by the medical community for over a century and also by the entomologists who had not utilized the NPA's approach. Entomologists have thought it impossible for Collembola to colonize humans, although they've acknowledged them as first of the decomposers to appear on human corpses. The research provides evidence of tremendous numbers of these organisms concealed, if not disguised, in their own aggregations. Yet the CDC maintains the position that Collembola cannot be human parasites and therefore they are of no medical importance. While the presence of Collembola in human skin

continues to be met with skepticism by some collembologists; the relationship of Collembola to humans is an area of research the NPA maintains has not been adequately explored. Where's Dr. House when you need him?

It was in the late 1800's that people with the sensation of bugs in their skin were first classified as having a delusional illness, a diagnosis still accepted although now challenged by the NPA's research. Many physicians have never heard of Collembola – let alone expect to find them in humans.     

Dermatologists and entomologists appear comfortable diagnosing Delusional Parasitosis (DOP) on the basis of the reported biting and crawling and without consultation with a psychiatric specialist. Some physicians will attempt therapeutic trials with pediculicides, scabicides, fungicides and mega doses of antibiotics, using treatment failure as a basis for a delusory diagnosis.

Individuals can often pinpoint a time and place when they first noticed the feeling of being bitten. A young mother in New York said the first time she felt the skin problem was in the middle of the night while sleeping in a hotel. Others first noticed symptoms after taking in a stray animal. Many have had water or sewage problems in their homes. A number of nurses reporting these symptoms remember caring for a patient who had a shaven head or was covered with skin sores. Reports also come in from individuals who have moved into new homes built on land previously used for agriculture or cattle grazing. Others, and most worrisome, report symptoms after being exposed to someone with this condition.

Michelle of Canada states: “I’ve watched my father go from a happy, balanced, reasonably healthy individual to the brink of suicide because of this condition. He had to quit working at a good job and is teetering on financial ruin. He has been treated so cruelly and inhumanely from so called ‘care-givers’, that if I hadn’t seen it for myself, I probably wouldn’t have believed it. This disease is destroying people’s lives. There is no help, not even basic curiosity, from the majority of the medical community. New diseases, bacteria, virus strains pop up all the time, so why is this situation so outlandish to the doctors? It’s time for the medical community to stand up and acknowledge this disease, and start doing their jobs.”

A nurse from the state of Washington says that both she and her ten year old suffer with this condition and came down with it at the same time. “I’m outraged that my human rights have not been taken into consideration because my complaint of having parasites did not fit into the medical community’s way of thinking. This in turn caused my family to abandon me as ‘crazy’. I have not been allowed to see my five beautiful grandchildren for 2 ½ years now.”

The NPA reports advances in its image research technique since the original digital imaging work was done in 2000. However, interpretation of slides and digital images still requires skill and experience. Without it people are left misdiagnosed, misguided and with secondary complications from the arsenal of chemicals and pesticides they feel forced to use in desperation. To date, the NPA reports that Collembola in human skin appear impervious to treatment.

Whether a crisis of delusional illness or Collembola, the longer it takes for the medical community and the Centers for Disease Control to take this seriously, the more widespread and well established it appears to become.

The National Pediculosis Association is a 501 (c)3 nonprofit organization serving the public since 1983. It's



website is [www.headlice.org](http://www.headlice.org).

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NATIONAL PEDICULOSIS ASSOCIATION

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