

Healthcare **Communication** Review

On Building Health Partnerships: Food-for-Thought, Practical Tips, Resources

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COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE

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What is Complementary and Alternative Medicine?

Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) refers to the many health practices whose treatments and products differ from the treatments and products of conventional medicine (Western medicine) – that is, different from the standard form of medical practice which, today, is represented by Medical Doctors (MDs), Doctors of Osteopathy (DOs), nurses (RNs), psychologists and other allied professionals.

Before the turn of the twentieth century, Western medicine was just one among the many health systems of that time, with no more authority than any of the others. It was only around the early 1900s that it gained sole authority in the field of medicine, thus becoming the conventional form of medical practice. In America after that, other health systems became unconventional forms of practice. Today, when these unconventional health systems and practices are used *along with* Western medicine, we call them *complementary* medicines. When they are used *instead of* conventional treatments, we call them *alternative* medicines. And when today's practitioners of Western medicine include some CAM treatments as part of the care they offer, they are said to be practicing *Integrative* medicine.

Types of CAM

The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (National Center, for CAM) was created in 1992 to study the effectiveness of various CAM practices and products. It has since identified the following four broad categories of CAM:

- Mind-Body Medicine:** Different techniques to help our minds ease our physical symptoms include meditation, prayer, biofeedback, art/music/dance therapies.
- Biologically Based Practices:** This involves the use of substances found in nature, such as herbs, foods and vitamins as well as other dietary supplements.
- Manipulative and Body-Based Practices:** Chiropractic and massage are some examples of the use of manipulation and touch to maintain and restore health.
- Energy Medicine:** Two types of therapies involving the use of energy fields are
 - 1) *biofield therapies*: therapies aimed at the energy fields that are around and affect people. These include qi gong, Reiki and therapeutic touch. And
 - 2) *bioelectromagnetic-based therapies*: therapies which, for example, use pulsed fields, magnetic fields and a.c./d.c. fields in unconventional ways.

The National Center also looks at whole medical systems that have developed here and in other countries. These other systems, which may use treatments from any of the four groups of CAM described above, include: ancient medicines such as **traditional Chinese medicine**, most notably associated with acupuncture, and India's **Ayurveda**, which uses herbs, massage, yoga and other means of healing; **homeopathy** which uses tiny doses of the same substance that is causing the problem, in order to build up the body's resistance to that substance; and **naturopathy** which uses non-invasive treatments such as massage, acupuncture, herbs and exercise to help the body heal itself. Interestingly, as some of these practices are proven to be effective and widely adopted by practitioners of conventional medicine, they often become part of mainstream medicine and are no longer considered to be CAM.□

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From the Editor

Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM), according to David Eisenberg of Harvard's School of Medicine, is "here to stay." As these pages will show, its use is now accepted by many patients and healthcare professionals. But CAM is not without its critics. In fact, it has a very vocal group of critics for whom CAM is little more than "snake oil" medicine and the study of its various practices is "snake oil" science or science in name only. Indeed, they consider CAM research to be poorly designed, in large part because of business and political pressures. Furthermore, they are dismayed at the credibility – in their view, the false credibility – that the act of studying CAM brings to it. They also object to what they see as a disregard for science-based and evidence-based practice along with an unwarranted reliance on subjective evidence.

What makes these critiques credible is that there are, undoubtedly, instances when CAM treatments and products are 'snake oil' and when CAM research does not meet rigorous scientific standards because of business and political pressures. Similar claims, however, can be made about conventional medical studies. In her book, *The Truth About the Drug Companies*, Dr. Marcia Angell (former editor of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, now teaching at Harvard Medical School) reports that the design of studies testing the safety and effectiveness of new, more expensive, 'copies' of already existing drugs ('me too' drugs), are skewed to support their placement in the market. That is, it is not uncommon for the studies to either compare the 'me too' drugs with placebos, rather than the drugs they seek to replace or, if they are compared to those drugs, they are not compared at equal doses. (To read our review of this book, visit www.healthcp.org/hcr/v5n1.pdf.)

Furthermore, the criticism that CAM practices rely on subjective evidence rather than science-based evidence suggests that practitioners of conventional medicine act solely on objective evidence. Even if that is desirable, which we question, that is not necessarily true. First, all the evidence related to conventional medical practice is not yet in. Second, doctors often disagree as to what treatments are best. Ask Dr. John Wennberg – a physician who has spent a great deal of time looking at the variations in treatments that occur throughout America – with doctors in different states and even in different hospitals within the same state, opting for different treatments. Visit <http://content.healthaffairs.org/cgi/reprint/3/2/6.pdf> for his paper "Dealing With Medical Practice Variation: A Proposal for Action" in which he notes that: "...the type of medical service provided is often found to be as strongly influenced by subjective factors related to the attitudes of individual physicians as by science."

All this means that readers will need to decide where they stand on CAM and will need to engage in their own 'critical thinking.' They will need to clearly formulate general and specific questions about CAM; identify relevant information; and scrutinize arguments pro and con. It is our hope that the following articles will help in that process. We begin with the article on page 1, which explains the difference between complementary and alternative medicines, as well as the different categories of CAM, and continue with articles that explain some of the key principles upon which its practices are based (page 3). We also suggest questions to ask when considering CAM treatments (page 4); list resources for finding more information (page 5); suggest how to talk with medical doctors about CAM (page 6) and end with information on how to choose CAM practitioners (page 8).

As always, we hope you find the articles in these pages useful and extend our best wishes for all to...

Be well. *Judith Greenfield*

CAM Principles, Practices & Products: Are They Safe? Do They Work?

Principles

While each form of CAM is grounded in its own particular principles and theories, principles that are common to most include the following: 1) prevention is central to good health; and 2) the overall health of patients requires attention to their interconnected physical, mental, spiritual and social needs. In other words, it is important to treat the whole person, rather than just treating their disease or condition.

These principles are not necessarily unique to CAM. We know, for instance, that practitioners of Western medicine have long promoted prevention. But what does treating the whole person mean and how does it relate to the practice of Western medicine? To answer that, we offer the following discussion of Western medicine's models of care. We begin with the model of care that has guided physicians, from the late 19th/early 20th century to the present – a *biomedical* model. In *Complementary and Alternative Medicine: Legal Boundaries and Regulatory Perspectives*, Michael Cohen, an attorney specializing in healthcare law, explains that the biomedical model of care draws, in part, on the works of two 17th Century thinkers – Sir Isaac Newton, who said that the universe can be reduced to its fundamental building blocks, and Rene Descartes, who saw the human body as having mechanical parts that can be analyzed and the mind as existing apart from, and independent of, the body.¹

Under the biomedical model, the 'whole' is viewed as the sum of all its parts. If one part is amiss, restoring the whole can be as 'simple' as restoring the part. Treating patients, therefore, calls for treating diseases and conditions by working to restore, in full or part, normal body functioning. And, as noted by Cohen, this has proven to be a very effective model for treating infectious diseases, injuries, and emergency care.

But a growing number of practitioners of Western medicine now argue that treatments, which focus solely on patients' body parts, have limited effectiveness. This view has been supported by relatively recent research findings, which show a strong connection between mind

and body, and these practitioners are calling for a new model of care – one that treats the whole person by addressing the biological, psychological and social factors which shape the course of an illness. Dr. George Engel first proposed this new model of care, which is called a *biopsychosocial* model, in the late 1970s. With this model in mind, we can see that the principle of treating whole persons not only guides CAM practitioners, but also guides some practitioners of Western medicine. There is, therefore, some agreement on guiding principles and this agreement, in turn, is likely a major reason why some medical doctors are now practicing integrative medicine.

Books to Check Out

Alternative Medicine: What Works: A Comprehensive, Easy-to-Read Review of the Scientific Evidence

By Adriane Fugh-Berman

and

How to Talk With Your Doctor: The guide for Patients and Their Physicians Who Want to Reconcile and Use the Best of Conventional and Alternative Medicine

By Ronald L. Hoffman, MD
with Sidney Stevens

To read customer reviews of these books...

Go to www.amazon.com, and Search for the title. Then click on the title when page comes up and Click on link for customer reviews.

Are CAM Practices and Products Safe? Do They Work?

Answers to questions regarding the safety and effectiveness of CAM practices and products are mixed. For some in the medical community, CAM is quack medicine at worst and misguided at best.² Nevertheless, in part due to the huge numbers of Americans who are treated by CAM practitioners and who use CAM products, studies are now underway to determine if they are, indeed, safe and effective.

When compared with scientific studies related to conventional medical theories and practices, studies of CAM are in their infancy. Nevertheless, some information is starting to come in. One especially notable series of studies is in the area of mind-body research – studies

which support the theory of interconnectedness of parts. According to Dr. Esther Sternberg, a senior scientist at the National Institutes of Health, these studies clearly connect "...the brain and the immune system, emotion and disease."³

What about acupuncture, chiropractic, dietary supplements and the many other forms of CAM? Does science have anything to say about them, in particular? The answer to that question is yes, a little, although much more time is needed to fully explore the effectiveness (or lack thereof) of particular CAM treatments and products. As reported by the National Center for CAM and the National Cancer Institute, research findings include the following:

See **Principles**, Pg. 5

Is CAM For You? Questions to Ask

If you are among those who have tried, or are open to trying CAM, you may be pleased to know that you are not alone. CAM has become increasingly popular among Americans, with almost 4 out of every 10 adults and 1 out of every 9 children using some form of it.¹ (Even more if you count those who take vitamins.) While CAM has its critics, as has been noted on pages 2 and 3 of this publication, some practitioners of conventional medicine are integrating certain forms of it into their practices. More importantly, as has also been noted on page 3, long-overdue studies of its safety and effectiveness have begun.

This relatively new effort to study CAM is most welcome because questions of safety and effectiveness should top the list when deciding whether or not to try any of its forms. It therefore bears repeating: when looking at study results, it's important to remember that studies are often targeted to a specific condition and population. That is, a treatment may be found to be safe and effective (or not) for people of a particular age group or for a particular health problem. But being found safe and effective (or not) for one condition or set of people does not necessarily mean it will be safe and effective (or not) for all conditions and all people.

On Asking Questions

Today's patients are expected to make informed choices about treatments. This calls for learning as much as they can about their particular conditions and treatment options – sometimes by doing some research. This is not to say that you, as a patient, should ignore what your doctors tell you and recommend. It simply means that you should not only have the final 'say so' on what to do, but what you decide should be based on *full understandings* of your condition and the different ways to deal with it. And sometimes, doing some extra research may be needed in order to get that full understanding – even though you may wish for the 'good old days' when all you were expected to do was what your doctor suggested.

But making your own decisions is basically a good thing. Why? Because Western medicine offers more treatment options now – options which not only offer the hope of greater results, but also carry greater risks. Generally speaking, then, patients are expected to ask questions about the many (standard) treatments options available to them. The same holds true if you are considering CAM. It's in your own best interests to ask questions there as well.

As stated above, the place to begin is with safety and effectiveness: *How well does it work? How often does it*

work well? Is it safe? Indeed, the questions to ask about CAM treatments are the same questions that should be asked about conventional treatments. These include: *What will the treatments involve? How will they affect my daily life? What are the best and worst possible results?*

On Finding Information About CAM

Asking various CAM practitioners about their treatments is a good place to begin. Other valuable sources of information include the websites listed on page 5 and, possibly, your own medical doctors. Even if you expect them to downplay, or "badmouth," a particular CAM, talking with them can be very helpful. Why? Because points made by opponents of CAM can help you think of (and ask about) things that you might not have otherwise considered. This can lead you to reverse or strengthen your position (if you had one to start with). For that reason, the decisions you make will likely be ones that are based on a lot of thought. And that's good.

The Next Decision: Complementary *OR* Alternative Medicine?

If, after asking questions, you decide to use an 'unconventional' form of treatment, the next step might be to decide whether to use it *with* or *instead of* conventional treatments. At one end of the spectrum, deciding to use CAM as an

alternative to conventional medical treatments may be easier to make if there are no conventional treatments available to you or if available treatments are very difficult to go through **and** have a very low rate of success. At the other end of the spectrum, deciding to use CAM in a complementary manner may also be easier to do if there are several, highly successful conventional treatments available to you. In any situation, however, decisions about CAM call for good understandings of conventional treatment options. It's especially important, therefore, to ask your doctors questions that include: *What are my treatment options? What are their success rates? What can I expect if I do nothing?* (Nothing conventional, that is.) And, *Is it safe to take this (CAM product) with the other medications I'm taking?*

Answers to these and other questions raised by your readings and conversations should help you make your decisions regarding CAM and conventional treatments. It is important to remember, however, that we can do all the right things when it comes to making a decision and still have unwelcome and unexpected outcomes. There are no guarantees for any form of medicine – conventional or otherwise!□

¹ See <http://nccam.nih.gov/news/camstats/2007/camuse.pdf>

Questions to ask about CAM treatments are the same questions that should be asked about conventional treatments.

Principles, continued from Pg. 3

- Spinal manipulation for low-back pain (generally performed by chiropractors, physical therapists, and osteopaths) has been found to be as effective as conventional treatments in relieving mild-to-moderate pain;
- Tai Chi may help older adults avoid getting shingles;
- Ginko Biloba is ineffective in reducing the development of dementia and Alzheimer's disease in older adults;
- High levels of anti-oxidants and zinc significantly reduce the risk of advanced age-related macular degeneration, but have no effect on cataracts;
- St. John's Wort may reduce the effectiveness of certain cancer drugs; and
- Acupuncture relieves pain and improves function for people with osteoarthritis of the knee;

In all of this, we offer two cautionary notes. First, regarding research results, just because something is found to be effective (or ineffective) for one condition, doesn't mean the same will be true for all conditions. (See the above findings about anti-oxidants and zinc.) To know how effective a particular treatment is on a wide variety of conditions, tests will need to be done for each of those conditions. But remember this: although it may be disappointing, it can be just as helpful to learn a treatment is ineffective as it is to learn that it is effective. Second, in terms of natural products, don't assume that natural means risk free (think wild mushrooms)! And even when they are normally safe, they may interact with prescription or over-the counter medications in ways that are harmful. For more information about selected CAM treatments and their effectiveness, see 'Finding CAM Info', below. □

¹ See <http://indylaw.indiana.edu/instructors/orentlicher/healthlw/Chap1B3.htm#Biomedical>

² See www.quackometer.net and www.sciencebasedmedicine.org

³ Quoted in, "What is Integrative Medicine?" found at www.webmd.com/cancer/integrative-med-cancer-7/integrative-care

Finding CAM Info

National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine • www.nccam.nih.gov

- *For Results of CAM Research:* click on 'Research' then 'Results'. Study results for particular years are also found on press releases. Click on 'News and Events' then on 'Press Releases' then on 'Press Release Archives.'
- *For Information About Particular CAMs:* Click on 'Health Info' then, 'Topics A-Z'
- *For Tips on Considering CAM and Selecting Practitioners:* Click on 'Health Info', then on 'Be Informed'

National Cancer Institute • www.cancer.gov

- *For Results of CAM Research:* 1) Enter 'CAM' in search Box, then 2) click on 'Clinical Trial Results.'
- *For Information About Particular CAMs, Including Theories of How They work:* Follow step 1), above, then 2) click on the CAM link for healing philosophies, approaches and therapies and 3) Find therapy of interest, click on 'patient' beneath it, then on 'Questions and Answers.'
- *For Tips on Considering CAM and Selecting Practitioners:* Follow steps 1 and 2, above then 3) click on 'Thinking About Complementary and Alternative Medicine.'

Mayo Clinic • www.mayoclinic.com • Enter CAM in the search box

MedlinePlus • www.medlineplus.gov • Enter 'CAM' in the search box

NY Online Access to Health (NOAH) • www.noah-health.org

- Click on 'Health Topics' Under 'Procedures and Medicine, then click on 'Complementary and Alternative Therapies.'

On Talking to Doctors About CAM

- **About.com** at www.asthma.about.com/od/asthmacam/a/CAM_MD_DISCUSS.htm?p=1 and at <http://patients.about.com/od/conventionaloralternative/a/doctortalkal.htm?p=1>
- **Oxford Health Plan** at www.oxhp.com/altmed/program/talk_pcp.html
- **NCCAM** at <http://nccam.nih.gov/timetotalk/D350.pdf>
- **National Cancer Institute** at www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/thinking-about-CAM/page6

Resource Guides

- **Alternative Medicine Foundation, www.amfoundation.org** - click 'Resource Guides' in left column for
 - links to *specific and general resources guides*;
 - links to *specific forms of alternative medicine*, which brings to you more links that include information on that form of medicine, its history, books and journals, professional organizations, and more; and
 - links to *health issues*, with similar information as links for specific forms of medicine, above.

Talking CAM With Your Doctors: Why, What If, How

Why Talk to Your Doctor About CAM?

Three good reasons for telling your medical doctors that you are using (or want to try) CAM treatments products are: 1) *Safety* – Even if an herb is normally safe to take, for instance, it may interact with prescriptions or over-the-counter drugs in ways that are harmful. 2) *Management of your care* – As an active patient, you are the manager. But the practitioners you turn to will be your co-managers. This is not a job you can do alone, which is why you go to see them in the first place. To take full advantage of the expertise they bring to your care, you will want their fully informed recommendations. That means, whether it is your CAM practitioners or your medical doctors, they should know about any and all of the treatments you are undergoing and products or medications you are taking. 3) *The model of care you want your doctors to follow* – If you want your doctors to treat *you*, the person, not just your disease, then it is important for them to know you. This can only happen if they know what you are doing, what you are thinking of doing and, very importantly, your reasons for doing so. Ideally speaking, they will ask you about any other treatments or products you have turned to, but if not, it is up to you to tell them anyway.

What If Your Doctors Don't Approve of CAM?

What if your doctors dismiss CAM and not only discourage your use of it, but also discourage any talk of it? There are a number of choices you might make. After doing some (or more) research, you can decide to do what you want with CAM and just not tell them – which, for the reasons described above, is not a good idea. You can decide to go along with them and forget about CAM. You can decide to try to find different doctors who are more open to working with you when it comes to CAM. Or, you can stay and try to get a dialogue going, in the hope that your use of CAM will eventually be accepted.

Making these decisions may not be easy. First, your choice of doctors may be limited by the number of available doctors or by insurance coverage. Second, you may prefer your doctors because of their medical expertise or, perhaps, for some other reason. What can you do then? Although there are no guarantees that it will bring about the results you want, you can try to build a relationship with them that will hopefully lead them to respect you and, as a result, be more open to listening to you – a worthy goal under any circumstances.

How to Build Relationships: Begin With Attitude!

In the hope of empowering patients to take charge of their care, patients are encouraged to think of themselves as healthcare consumers. While it is certainly important for patients to take charge, some patients believe that take-charge healthcare consumers should tell their doctors what they want and then not be swayed by what their doctors

have to say about it. ‘Buyer Beware’ is, after all, at the heart of a business relationship, from which the idea of patients as consumers is drawn. If you are among those who feel that way, perhaps you might reconsider and think about the attitude you want to bring to discussions of CAM. To assist you with that, we offer the following questions as a guide.

Does being an empowered, take-charge patient mean you have to think of yourself as a consumer and tend to distrust your doctors? Might that attitude actually limit your options? Might you be more empowered if you neither *blindly accept* nor *blindly reject* what your doctors have to say before making your decision? Won't you get more information with back-and-forth discussions of the pros and cons of particular treatments? When these discussions are combined with independent research, aren't your treatment choices more informed ones? Aren't more informed choices more empowered choices?

Furthermore, when you invite discussion of your doctors' views – even as you firmly, but respectfully, disagree – aren't you more likely to build strong relationships that are mutually trusting and respectful? Might these types of relationships lead your doctors to listen to you as they have not listened before? Isn't that the way most relationships work? In our personal and business lives, aren't we more open to the people we feel good about than to those we don't? What attitude do you want to bring to your doctors?

How Might You Talk About CAM? Practical Tips

Recommendations for talking to your doctors about CAM include the following:

- Introduce the subject and ask if they are open to exploring them with you;
- Don't apologize for your interest in CAM, but do explain it. Simply let them know why you're interested;
- Explain that you will keep them up-to-date on whatever CAM treatments you are following, products you are taking, and will also let them know if your CAM practitioner suggests a treatment plan that conflicts with their plan;
- If they're open to this, ask what, if anything, they can share about particular forms of CAM;
- Tell them you will research treatments and bring back any evidence-based results that you may find;
- If you have already done some research when you first raise the issue, be prepared to discuss the particular CAM you are considering. Bring an information sheet with the sources of your information along and a summary of your findings. Offer them a copy if they'd like. (Keep the original for yourself.)

For more information, see ‘Finding Cam Info’ on page 5. □

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Personal Choice and
Self Direction
Teamwork
Communication
Genuine Caring

Our Vision

We envision a healthcare system where patients who want to be active participants in their healthcare will be encouraged and supported by the healthcare professionals who provide that care.

Our Mission

Our mission is to improve patients' understanding of, and participation in, their healthcare by fostering meaningful communication between patients, their caregivers and healthcare professionals.

Our Method

Our method is to focus on helping healthcare professionals, patients and their advocates build relationships and shared decisionmaking skills.

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Choosing CAM Practitioners

“Complementary and alternative medicine has an important role to play in modern health care. Centuries of experience have led to effective therapies that are enhancing Western medical practice.”

Gerald D. Fischbach, M.D., Dean, Faculty of Medicine, Columbia University, College of Physicians and Surgeons¹

The upside of the increasing acceptance of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) by the traditional medical community is that it's easier for today's patients to access other options for restoring and maintaining their health. The down side, if you can call it that, is that now you have more work to do. That is, you not only need to do the necessary legwork for deciding which medical practitioner and treatment to select, but which CAM and its practitioner to select.

Fortunately, excellent suggestions for choosing and using CAM practitioners are offered by both conventional and alternative sources, some of which are listed in this issue on page 5 (see **Finding CAM Info**). For the most part, recommendations for choosing CAM practitioners mirrors recommendations for choosing medical practitioners: identify professionals to consider, learn about their credentials and experience, and then “interview” them to see if they will be a good “fit” for you. To find CAM practitioners, the National Cancer Institute suggests, ask doctors, nurses, social work staff, hospitals, and health and wellness organizations. Finding information on the web can also be valuable, but be sure the website is a credible source of information (visit www.mlanet.org and click on ‘health consumers’). Also, know that information on particular practitioners found in Professional Organizations contain information provided by those practitioners and does not reflect any independent judgment regarding the quality of their care.

When meeting for the first time with a CAM professional, you might ask: 1) about their training and experience in general as well as their experience treating people with your condition; 2) about their willingness to work with your medical doctor; 3) about what is involved in the treatment; and 4) what you can expect in terms of results. You might also ask yourself how comfortable you feel with the practitioner, the treatment setting and its staff – including how easy it is to get an appointment – and whether the treatment is covered by insurance. In the end, the credibility and experience of the practitioner as well as your emotional and economic comfort levels should guide your choice.□

¹ Quoted on www.rosenthal.hs.columbia.edu/who.html