

# Alternative vs conventional medicine essay



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Sooner or later, every person deals with conventional or alternative medicine. It is interesting to consider the difference between these two approaches to understand which approach is more effective. According to the World Health Organization, alternative medicine is “ a broad set of health care practices that are not part of the country’s own tradition and are not integrated into the dominant health care system” (Medicines, 2013, Page 1). Conventional medicine is a traditional scientific approach based on evidence and research; it relies on tests, theories, and analysis.

There are several considerable differences between conventional and alternative medicine that concern scientific proof, the level of education, economics, treatment focus, and other factors. Conventional medicine is a conservative approach which everyone has experienced going to hospitals and polyclinics. Conventional medicine has two main directions: surgical intervention and pharmaceutical treatment. Alternative medicine involves numerous practices concerning diet and nutrition, herbal remedies, manual healing methods, acupuncture, mind/body intervention, pharmacological and biological treatment, and others (Steyer, 2010).

First, the conventional approach implies taking into account efficacy studies for treatments. On the contrary, alternative medicine does not consider scientific proof to be necessary. In this light, it appears to be illogical that so many people turn to alternative methods where there is no proven evidence. There is an opinion that all positive results gained from alternative therapies can be attributed to the placebo effect. Second, specialists in alternative medicine usually focus on the state of the whole body, while conventional medicine doctors mostly treat a specific area of a patient’s body.

For instance, various kinds of meditation and massages give a calming effect helping to relieve pain. Conventional medicine mostly treats the problem of a specific body area applying the symptomatic approach. If a patient has a sore throat, some special medication for the throat can be used.

Consequently, the conventional approach is often criticized for hiding symptoms instead of performing a deep analysis. However, this criticism is not always adequate because, in most cases, conventional specialists carry out research (for instance, tests to reveal the type of infection) that helps to determine the cause of the disease.

Alternative medicine has a different view of illness in comparison to conventional medicine. It is common for alternative medicine practitioners to consider a disease as some kind of imbalance in the person's vital energy.

Generally, alternative medicine specialists look for some complex causes of a health problem, while conventional doctors usually treat symptoms.

Thereby, the alternative approach affects the lifestyle as a whole concentrating on healthy nutrition, a balanced emotional state, and a proper correlation between physical exercises and rest.

Alternative medicine pays much attention to preventative and health maintaining practices. The level of education and licensure among conventional practitioners is higher than practitioners of alternative medicine. This factor makes conventional medicine more credible than alternative medicine. Doctors study many years at a University, plus residency in order to obtain a license to practice. Conventional medicine providers are people who have a degree in medicine (M. D. ) or osteopathy

(D. O). Correspondingly, alternative medicine representatives do not hold these degrees.

One more significant difference between conventional and alternative medicine concerns the approach: common or individualized. Alternative medicine applies an individualized approach to a patient's individual constitution and specific symptoms. Although treating symptoms may sound wrong, it should be mentioned that the alternative medicine approach may not detect a serious problem. For instance, focusing on vital energy, an alternative practitioner may fail to diagnose cancer. Another significant difference between conventional and alternative medicine involves professional supervision.

Unless a physician is practicing on an expired or revoked license, conventional practices are legal, while only some alternative practices are licensed, but not required to be. The downfall of going to an unlicensed practitioner is that it is not quite clear who will be responsible in the case of a treatment failure. In the context of economics, the comparison between conventional and alternative medicine can have contradictions. On the one hand, the alternative approach does not usually employ expensive innovative technologies.

On the other hand, if a person is insured through their work, then the conventional route would be best because it is covered through health insurance while alternative methods are not. Presently, little research has been conducted on the reliability of alternative medicine, so it may be some time before health insurance will pay for alternative medicine. Further

analysis of the difference between conventional and alternative medicine discovers one more peculiarity concerning the patients' role in the process of a disease treatment. Alternative medicine makes this role more active, therefore, giving the patient more power.

On the contrary, conventional medicine implies the patient's subordinate role having to follow the prescription. Patients make the choice to follow conventional or alternative medicine. The approaches differ in the amount of time they require. Alternative medicine can require many sessions depending on what needs healing. Sometimes conditions do not allow spending so much time and require immediate medical intervention. In this case, conventional medicine is a better option. If a patient were to have acute appendicitis, there would be no chance of healing it with the help of herbs and meditation.

There are also some similarities between conventional and alternative medical approaches. First, both approaches are aimed at helping a patient to feel better. Second, alternative medicine practitioners often tell the patient some stories about how some kind of treatment has helped a particular person; these stories from life are provided on the basis of evidence from practice. Many general practitioners also use this method in order to persuade the patient of the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of a particular kind of treatment.

This method is very popular because it builds a bridge between theoretical knowledge and practical evidence. People like to hear stories about other people from the real life instead of some abstract figures and statistics.

Third, both medical doctors and alternative practitioners act in order to do no harm. The treatment is always prescribed considering the ratio between healing purposefulness and negative side-effects. This method of finding a compromise between use and harm is common for both conventional and alternative medicine.

Additionally, both medical approaches can be contributed by the placebo effect. It is well-known that if a patient believes that some kind of treatment will definitely help, the result might be positive. In this light, the human factor plays a considerable role. If a patient trusts the doctor, no matter if it is a medical doctor or an alternative practitioner, the chances for healing are much more promising. Today, the alternative approach is often used as a kind of complementary treatment together with the traditional approach.

One should bear in mind that alternative medicine and complementary medicine are not the same. While the methods of complementary medicine can be applied simultaneously with conventional medicine, alternative medicine supposes the use of alternative methods instead of conventional ones. The problem is that patients seldom report alternative approach application to their doctor, which can be dangerous. For instance, if a patient consults both a physician and a naturopath, it may happen that the latter prescribes some herbs that evoke a negative reaction while interacting with each other.

For some reason, patients do not like to tell doctors about using complementary treatment. Conventional and alternative medicine approaches have certain differences and similarities that include scientific

evidence, time, focus area, educational degrees, financial aspect, and some others. In the course of the research, it was found out that alternative medicine focuses on the whole body, while the conventional approach deals with a particular problematic area.

Conventional medicine relies on scientifically proven theories; alternative methods do not require profound research. As opposed to alternative medicine, conventional medicine involves highly educated professionals holding M. D. or D. O. degrees. The alternative approach gives more power to the patient in comparison with the conventional one. Both alternative and conventional kinds of medicine deal with the human factor because it is important for a patient to trust the doctor. Now the question is, which method does the patient feel more comfortable with?