

# Alternative medicine essay 9

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**Abstract** This paper is going to educate the reader about Alternative and Complementary Medicine which is also known as CAM. The paper will define Alternative and Complementary Medicine or CAM and compare it to conventional medicine. The main focus of the paper will be examining the different types of CAM. The types of CAM will be broken into five different groups which are : Whole or Alternative Medical Systems, Mind-Body Medicine, Biologically Based Practices, Manipulative and Body-Based Practices, and Energy Medicine.

The reader will read about many mainstream practices such as Chiropractic and Physical therapy as well as many less popular practices such as Color Therapy and Reiki. The paper will also briefly discuss my personal opinion and interest of CAM as well as CAM related to health insurance CAM – Alternative and Complementary Medicine Millions of people in the United States suffer from a chronic illness of some kind. A chronic illness is a long-term condition for which there seems to be no cure such as arthritis, allergies, high blood pressure, digestive problems and back pain.

Most of the time people that live with chronic illness use conventional medicine, which is taught to medical students in medical schools throughout the world and is based on science and clinical research and most treatments have scientific evidence of their effectiveness but others use Alternative medicine. Alternative medicine has many different origins and philosophies, comes from many different cultures and involves many different practices. Alternative medicine is used for treatment, preventive health care, health maintenance or to enhance well being.

There are several established alternative therapies that have earned respectability because they are effective. Methods such as chiropractic, physical therapy, acupuncture and homeopathy are well researched and their practitioners are well trained and have come to be widely accepted. There are also literally hundreds of other types of alternative treatments that, on the surface seem to be a bit bizarre and are less main stream. The list of what is considered alternative medicine changes often as therapies are proven safe and effective and become adopted into conventional health care.

Patients with a terminal illness such as cancer, often turn to alternative medicine after conventional medical treatment has failed them or vice versa. An example of alternative medicine in this case would be using a special diet for cancer treatment instead of or after radiation or chemotherapy. In some cases alternative medicine and conventional medicine can be used together. When this occurs it is called Complementary medicine. An example of this would be when physical therapy is used to rehabilitate a patient after surgery.

The use of Complementary Methods and Alternative Medicine is often referred to as CAM and includes a group of diverse medical and health care systems, practices, and products that are not generally considered part of conventional medicine (CAM Overview : NCCAM). The chart below show the percentage of adults and children in the U. S who are using some form of CAM (2007 National HealthInterviewSurvey (NHIS) results : NCCAM). [pic] It is unfortunate that at this time that even though there are so many people

using different forms of alternative medicine, health insurance coverage is not very good at all.

Mainstream forms of alternative medicine such as physical therapy is usually covered to some degree by insurance providers but not usually to the level of conventional medicine. Less popular forms of alternative medicine is usually not covered at all. As these practices become more proven and effective providers should be forced to provide more coverage to their customers. It will be interesting to see how the potential new universal healthcare system will or will not incorporate alternative medicine. This could be one of the key factors that influence politicians and the people on this issue.

The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) is a government agency that monitors scientific research on alternative medicines and keeps the public informed on the results of alternative medicine research studies. The NCCAM divides alternative therapies into five major groups: Whole or Alternative Medical Systems - These type of medical systems are some of the most common and often come from complex treatments based upon theories that often have evolved over centuries and often in eastern countries such as China, Korea and India.

Examples of these types of systems include Acupuncture, Homeopathic medicine, and Naturopathic medicine. According to (NCCAM) the term "acupuncture" describes a family of procedures involving the stimulation of anatomical points on the body using a variety of techniques. The acupuncture technique that has been most often studied scientifically

involves penetrating the skin with thin, solid, metallic needles that are manipulated by the hands or by electrical stimulation. Acupuncture is regulated by the FDA all practitioners must be licensed and abide by the rules and regulations in regards to the use of needles which are set by the FDA.

Acupuncture is pretty safe and there have not been many major incidents reported to the FDA. Most of the time if there is a problem it has to do with the sterilization of needles but there is also the risk of punctured organs <http://nccam.nih.gov/health/acupuncture> (Acupuncture : NCCAM).

Homeopathy or Homeopathic medicine seeks to stimulate the body's ability to heal itself by giving very small doses of highly diluted substances. This technique was developed in Germany more than 200 years ago by Samuel Hahnemann.

Homeopathic practitioners believe that these highly diluted solutions can be powerful medicines and can cure various diseases and illnesses such as the common cold, digestive problems, influenza, hay fever, and earaches.

Remedies can be taken as a powder, a pill or a liquid, can be rubbed into the skin or injected. There are usually no side effects although sometimes a patient may feel worse before he feels better (Homeopathy : NCCAM).

Naturopathic Medicine focuses on supporting health rather than combating disease. Naturopathic medicine uses the healing power of nature to maintain and restore health (Naturopathy : NCCAM).

The use of natural treatments is to get to the root of the problem and what actually created the problem in the first place. Its goal is to create a healthy

inner body and outer body. Believers claim naturopathic medicine prevents illness because people are taught healthy diet modifications and lifestyle changes to avoid diseases. Since this system focuses on natural healing there isn't much risk involved only the risk of the condition getting worst

Mind-Body Medicine - The concept of the interconnection between the brain and body has been around for quite a while.

Ancient healing practices, such as Traditional Chinese Medicine emphasized important links between the mind and body. Recently people have come to appreciate the powerful effect the mind has over the body. People think that their mind has the power to heal their body and if they have a healthy mind they will have a healthy body. There are many techniques that are being used such as meditation, prayer, mental healing, and therapies that use creative outlets such as art, music, or dance (CAM Overview : NCCAM). The three that are most interesting to me are hypnotherapy, biofeedback, and color therapy.

Hypnotherapy is the most widely practiced of these therapies. The patient is put into a hypnosis-induced trance and then treated in a variety of ways to relieve anxiety, pain or stress (Clinical Hypnotherapy : Cleveland Clinic).

Relaxation and visualization are stress relieving therapies often used together to treat mental and emotional problems and reduce muscle tension. The goal is to induce a calm mind and body. Visualization uses the patient's imagination and right-brain activity to create positive healing images, which initiate changes in attitudes or behavior.

Biofeedback is a technique used especially for stress related conditions such as asthma, migraine headaches, high blood pressure and insomnia (Biofeedback using your mind to improve your health : Mayo Clinic). The patient is hooked up to sensitive machines that monitor small metabolic changes in the body such as heartbeat, temperature, muscle tension as well as brainwaves. The patient is trained to control brainwave activity as well as slow the heartbeat and modify the other functions through breathing and relaxation techniques.

Color therapy is based on the belief that diseases, pain, cosmetic problems, personality, " spiritual attunement", and intellectual or artistic capabilities are each associated with a specific color. There are several different therapies associated with colors: Color Breathing, Color Imagination, Color Meditation, and Hydrochromopathy. Color Breathing involves the patient imagining himself surrounded by a cloud of a specific color. The color depends on what the patient's problem is. For example yellow is used for stomach, nerves, spleen and pancreas. Blue is used for large intestines, skin, connective tissue and lungs.

The patient breathes deeply and imagines the color filling his lungs and flowing throughout his body until it gets to the body part in need of treatment. Color Imagination involves visualizing a specific color in order to cure a disease associated with that color. Color Meditation is a combination of the previous two therapies and parts of Eastern philosophies. It involves visualizing cones of different colors, which point to seven major " chakras" or psychic centers. Each of these chakras has a color that governs it and

meditation and the use of colored light helps to open and reinforce the chakras.

Hydrochromopathy is a variation that departs a little from the mind-body connection although it still requires a strong placebo influence. It involves filling a colored glass bottle with distilled water and heating it in sunlight for at least three hours. The resulting "color charged" water is then used as a treatment for various conditions. A fever is treated by blue charged water, red-charged water is taken to increase energy, green charged water improves overall health etc (Color Therapy : About Holistic Healing).

Biologically Based Practices - These use natural substances such as herbs, foods and vitamins and dietary supplements, as well as other "natural" substances such as shark cartilage, shellfish shells, essential oils, metals, gems and crystals. The chart below shows the most commonly used natural products by adults in 2007 (2007 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) results : NCCAM)[pic] A dietary supplement is "a product (other than tobacco) that contains a dietary ingredient intended to supplement the diet". This may include vitamins, minerals, herbs or other botanical amino acids, enzymes, organ tissues, and metabolites.

These supplements can be taken in several forms such as tablets, liquids or powders and are considered foods not drugs. Many people today take supplements of this kind. Vitamins and minerals such as iron are routinely prescribed to pregnant women and the shelves in healthfoodshops are stacked to the ceiling with "natural products" that give you energy, make you sleep, help you to lose or gain weight, help women get through



menopause or ease menstrual symptoms, help men build muscles, and protect you from a whole range of illnesses.

Some dietary supplements have been proven to be effective treatments for some conditions and have been adopted by conventional medical practitioners. For example scientists have found that folic acid prevents some birth defects and an eye disease called age-related macular degeneration, is slowed down by vitamins and zinc. The most common therapy of this kind is a daily multi-vitamin and mineral tablet. The human body needs a variety of vitamins and minerals for health and these days some people believe that the food we eat does not provide enough of these vitamins and minerals (Using Supplements Wisely : NCCAM).

Herbal remedies have been in existence for centuries and many herbs and plants have a powerful effect on the body. There are some common herbal treatments such as Aloa Vera for burns, Senna taken for constipation, ginger or mint taken for an upset stomach and ginseng taken to improve overall health and stamina. More recently Gingko Biloba has become very popular as an anti-aging supplement because of its antioxidant properties, which reduce free radicals in the body. Black Cohosh, an American Indian remedy has become a popular treatment for menstrual problems. There are also some very unusual and unorthodox herbal remedies.

For example Carnivora therapy uses an extract from the Venus Fly Trap plant as a treatment for cancer. A few years ago there was a controversy over the claim that eating apricots kernels would cure cancer. Apricot kernels was claimed, contain vitamin B-17 also known as Laetrile, which when eaten

would kill or prevent cancer in most cases. It was also claimed that if you ate seven apricot kernels a day you would never develop cancer. These claims were not backed up by clinical trials. In fact eating apricot kernels can be fatal as when crushed they produce cyanide, a lethal poison.

The Food and Drug Administration banned the sale of apricot kernels, which led to many cancer patients traveling to Mexico for treatment. (Using Supplements Wisely : NCCAM) One of the most controversial dietary supplement therapies is the use of shark cartilage as a treatment for small cancerous tumors. Supporters of this remedy say that shark cartilage extract inhibits blood supply to small tumors and stops them from growing and metastasizing, a process called angiogenesis. So far there have been no clinical trials that prove this theory but this is a very popular supplement taken by many cancer sufferers. Cartilage : Cancer Institute) Aromatherapy is the therapeutic use of essential oils taken from plants, seeds, roots and flowers. It is not usually the aromas of the oils that have healing properties, but the essence or chemical make-up of the oils. This essence is usually rubbed onto the skin or made into a tea. The most common use of Aromatherapy is Vicks Vapor Rub, a blend of camphor, menthol and eucalyptus oil, which is rubbed onto the chest as a treatment for a stuffy nose or a cold (Aromatherapy : Cancer Institute).

**Manipulative and Body-Based Practices** This is based on manipulating or moving one or more body parts as in chiropractic treatments, osteopathic manipulation, physical therapy and massage. Chiropractic uses physical manipulation of the body, especially the spinal column, to relieve pain and aid the body's inner healing power. Chiropractic has come to be more

accepted into mainstream medicine in recent years as its effectiveness as a treatment for many conditions including back pain, headaches and sciatica has been demonstrated. It is now the second largest primary health care field in the world.

Chiropractic doctors believe that problems with alignment in the spinal column can squeeze nerve endings and pathways, a condition they call subluxation. This squeezing of the nerves causes various ailments and conditions. A chiropractic adjustment of the spinal column, where the spine is re-aligned or straightened will release these nerves which will help the body's innate tendency to heal itself. Chiropractic practitioners earn a Doctor of Chiropractic degree from college and have to pass a state licensing board exam (Chiropractic : NCCAM).

Osteopathy is a holistic preventive treatment used to restore balance in the musculoskeletal system. Osteopathic therapists believe that all of the body's systems work together and tension or "mechanical restrictions" anywhere in the musculoskeletal system can adversely affect other systems and organs in the body (Osteopathy : Natural Medicine Suite 101). Some therapists use osteopathic manipulation, a full-body hands-on technique. Some of the illnesses treated by osteopaths are arthritis, allergies, cardiac diseases, chronic fatigue syndrome, high blood pressure, headaches, digestive disorders and bladder problems.

Osteopaths earn a college degree, must complete an internship and residency program and pass State Licensing Board exams. They have the ability to prescribe drugs and perform surgery. Physical Therapy is the treatment of

disease and trauma by various physical and mechanical therapies including exercise, heat treatment and massage. It is now so mainstream as to be almost no longer considered an alternative form of medicine. A Physical Therapist is trained to help patients with injuries, paralysis, degenerative diseases, dizziness and other diseases that restrict movement or cause chronic pain.

Energy Medicine - Many Eastern non-conventional therapies incorporate the concept of energy fields and universal energy into their mind-body treatments, seeing humans as part of an interconnected, universal energy field. These therapies are sub divided into two types Biofield and Bioelectromagnetic (CAM Overview : NCCAM). Biofield Therapies affect "energy fields that surround and penetrate the human body" by placing the hands on the body or in or through these fields. Examples include Reiki, Therapeutic Touch, Polarity Therapy and Shiatsu.

Reiki is an ancient form of energy healing from Tibet. Reiki therapists place their hands on the chakras as well as major organs and glands to "channel healing energies". It is used to treat emotional and mental distress as well as to fine tune "spiritual focus and clarity". It is believed that if the patient's spirit is healed the body will heal also. (Reiki : NCCAM) Reiki Masters transfer energy that is universal rather than personal. Reiki practitioners are trained by Reiki Masters, which involves a series of initiations to "activate the practitioner's healing power".

Therapeutic Touch is a similar treatment based on the ancient art of the laying on of hands. The therapists do not actually touch the patient but hold

their hands several inches from the body. The therapist has the ability to identify energy imbalances in the invisible energy fields that surround the human body. Therapists clear the defective energy field and replace it with their own personal energy (What is Therapeutic Touch : Therapeutic Touch). It is used to help the healing of wounds, promote relaxation, relieve pain and "ease the dying process".

Shiatsu is a Japanese therapy that developed from traditional Chinese medicine and involves the belief that energy in the body (Chi) flows through channels called meridians, which correspond to various organs in the body (Shiatsu : Holistic Online). Health is governed by five elements: water, fire, earth, wood and metal. The practitioner uses thumbs, hands, forearms, knees and feet to apply pressure to the body, which stimulates the flow of energy and restores balance. Polarity Therapy involves using a light touch that focuses on the spine to balance the body's energy flow.

It is based on the theory that everything in nature including the human body is influenced by a "polarity between positive and negative energy charges" (What is Polarity Therapy : APTA). These energy charges must be in balance in order to prevent illness and pain. Polarity Therapists also use diet and nutrition, polarity yoga and psychological counseling, positive thinking and self-awareness. It is a blend of Western therapies such as chiropractic and osteopathy with eastern therapies that use chakras and the five elements associated with them.

Bioelectromagnetic based therapies involves the use of magnets and "electromagnetic fields, pulsed fields, magnetic fields, or alternating current

or direct current fields". Magnetic Therapy is an ancient therapeutic technique based on the use of magnets on the acupuncture points of the body in order to help the body recuperate, relieve stress and ease pain. The theory is that magnetic fields produced by magnets can penetrate the human body and influence individual cells. The magnetic force stimulates nerves to create a blood flow to swollen and injured areas.

Magnets used in this way are also supposed to affect the iron in red blood cells or create an alkaline reaction in the body. There are many magnetic products available that can be taped to the skin, worn in your shoes, as a belt, as jewelry or slept on. Many athletes such as golfers, footballers and tennis players wear magnetic devices to relieve sports related injuries or aches. Magnet therapy is used to treat arthritis, insomnia, headaches and back aches. Sometimes a magnet is incorporated into a copper bracelet, a popular alternative treatment for arthritis sufferers (Use Of Magnets : NCCAM).

Those are just a few of the alternative medicines and therapies available today. Many of them are rooted in ancient philosophies and practices. Most of them sound logical and plausible and give hope to people seeking treatment for incurable diseases. Some of them are reputable and accepted forms of treatment, but many are considered quackery. A large percentage of American people use alternative therapies and medicines and the number is growing. Any one of these alternative therapies, no matter how strange they sound, may or may not work for you or me.

My general thoughts on Alternative Medicine are that I am one of those people who feels like that if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. A lot of Alternative therapies definitely seem too good to be true. Unfortunately for me, I suffer from arthritis and if my arthritis continues to get worse then I have decided to try some form of alternative medicine because I am tired of the pain and will try anything. It will be interesting to see what type of coverage I will get from my health provider.

Fortunately for me I was able to find out some valuable information at the NCCAM website (Paying for CAM : NCCAM). I was able to find out that some forms of CAM are more commonly covered than others and I also learned the importance of asking questions and what questions to ask to CAM and health providers. Hopefully when all is said and done with I will be miraculously healed and a true believer of Alternative Medicine. Bibliography 2007

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