

# Free complementary and alternative medicine essay example

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## **Abstract**

There has been a very big difference between alternative medicine and modern conventional medicine in terms of use, diagnosis treatment and most of all promotion. Alternative medicine has been disadvantaged over the years with lack of promotion because of its basis on beliefs and indigenous knowledge rather than evidence and proof. For this reason, most of its products have been operating in the black market with major implications on conservation of animals such as rhinos and elephants because of rampant poaching activities. However, in the recent past promotion has increased because it is cheaper and readily accessible. Also there has been change in the diseases affecting a person, which is from communicable diseases to noncommunicable diseases that are best treated using alternative medicine. Complementary and alternative medicine is a term that has been used throughout history to refer to products, therapies as well as health care practices that are not based on scientific methods of getting evidence, although they have medical healing effects. This medicine is based majorly on beliefs rather than scientific evidences and is termed complementary because it adds to the conventional treatment. Examples of it include acupuncture, energy medicine such as electromagnetic therapy, herbal medicine, homeopathy, Chinese medicine, chiropractic medicine and many others. This form of medicine is referred to as alternative if it substitutes conventional methods, complementary when used together with the conventional method and lastly, integrative when both conventional and complementary are used together (Haugen 2008).

Because of its lack of scientific evidences, research and tests, it has been

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highly disregarded throughout history and has only been used by very few people and this has been so because of limited evidence and no guarantee of cure or effectiveness of treatment. For this reason promotion of use of alternative medicine has lacked, and this has facilitated people not knowing about its existence as well as their use. However, throughout the recent past promotion has increased due to their easy accessibility and affordability in contrast to conventional medicine which is very expensive and inaccessible. They have also been advocated because most of them are in their natural forms and have very minimal side effects instead of the other conventional methods which are synthetic, containing chemicals and have lots of side effects (Larson 2007).

Throughout the recent past these side effects have become more and more, mainly because of the change in type of diseases affecting people and this is from communicable diseases common in the past to noncommunicable diseases that are caused by people's lifestyles such as lack of exercises, unhealthy eating, stress and obesity that cause cardiovascular diseases, depression, hypertension, diabetes and other complex diseases. These diseases are very complex and require highly synthetic and very complex medicines. These drugs cause heavy side effects and most of the time do not provide cure, they only help reduce the effects of the diseases, maintaining them to bearable levels, for example, the case of diabetes. It is, therefore, very clear that the two forms of medicines have been highly polarized mostly in terms of their promotions to the public and this has an effect on overdependence and reliance on one form and completely disregarding the other. The disadvantage of this is that the one that has been disregarded

could be the most effective and produce positive results and possibly minimal side effects. To avoid this, the most convenient way of handling medical treatments should be through the use of integrative medicine that combines alternative medicine with conventional medicine (Larson 2007). Chinese traditional medicine is a good example of alternative, sometimes complementary alternative medicine. It includes a very wide range of activities, therapies, products and practices that were developed many years back in China and forms part of China's culture and traditional beliefs passed down from generation to generation. Unlike other traditional medicine from other cultures, traditional Chinese medicine is documented in various doctrines, for example, the yellow emperor's inner canon and this has led to great advancement of the alternative medicine throughout history. However, Chinese alternative medicine has failed to reconcile with modern conventional medicine due to major disagreements from both sides as a result of differences in practices, diagnosis as well as methodology (Wan 2008).

Traditional Chinese medicine is based on beliefs and indigenous knowledge. It does not put any emphasis on human anatomy but rather dwells on body entities such as breathing, digestion and other body functions that work together harmoniously and with the surrounding environment to facilitate a person's good health. Failure of an entity or function is perceived as a disease, poor health or well being and the Chinese traditional medicine aims at identifying discrepancy in the functions of the entities and tries to bring back their harmonious interactions. This form of medicine uses plants, animals as well as mineral products, however, limited research and

experiments have been made to test their effectiveness and, therefore, puts at risk certain plants and animals such as rhinos, elephants bears etc. at risk due to exploitation such as poaching for their horns, tusks, bile among other things, yet there might be no guarantee of wellbeing. Most of these products are traded in the black market, and they fetch very high prices, for example ivory is currently more expensive than gold in the black market (Chen 2003).

For plants, there are some that are poisonous in nature and due to minimum research they pose risk to human life. However traditional Chinese medicine have had some benefits as they over the years formed the basis for the improvement and development of modern conventional medicine, for example, use of the cinchona plant and artemisinin that contains quinine. Quinine is a very important chemical component for the development of antimalarial drugs. However, its use in the form of alternative medicine is to some extent risky because certain parameters such as concentration and dosage have not been determined, and this would lead to the development of resistance for the case of the malaria parasites in case wrong dosages are taken, and this would affect the fight against diseases not only malaria but also others. These plants were mainly used to reduce fever as a result of malaria. It involved making simple decoctions and infusions that were taken and were effective. It was a simple case of trial and error where many attempts are made until the most effective works (Mehlhorn and Wu 2013). However, for the use of these plants for treatment of malaria to be effective, the practitioners would need more information such as dosage, amount and concentration of the medicine that would necessary and important to

increase the treatment's efficacy. In addition to this, diseases or rather parasites have a tendency of developing resistance to certain treatment and malaria is one of them that has shown this tendency as most quinine based medicine, both alternative and conventional medicine are showing reluctance in delivering effective treatment. It is, therefore, necessary for the alternative medical practitioners to further their levels of education on the treatments. The best way is to adopt integrative medicine where they would combine alternative medicine with modern conventional medicine, and this would be the most sensible and advantageous way to treating and advancing the fields of medicine in the case of malaria treatment. Even though use of alternative medicine has been encouraged and advocated it has its implication especially in the herbal treatment of malaria using plants and animal parts such cinchona bark, powdered rhino horns among others. It enlarges the black market for rhino horns that increases' poaching incidents, and this is a major problem since rhinos are very threatened animals. Also, due to fact that certain parameters such as dosage and concentrations are not well known they bring the risk of resistance by the disease parasites (Willcox 2004).

Complementary and alternative medicine is important to the human race. They have been there throughout human history. They are mainly based on beliefs and mostly a result of constant trial and error. They form part of people's culture as part of their indigenous knowledge that is passed down from one generation to the next. However, this form of medicine has not been highly advocated due to lack of evidence and research. For this reason, its use and application is never promoted. But, it is a very relevant factor

since it forms the basis for the development of modern conventional medicine, for example, isolation of quinine from artemisinin and cinchona plant which has been used in china as alternative medicine for curing fever as a result of malaria. It is, therefore, clear that both alternative and conventional medicines are important and the best, and sensible way to hand their highly polarized and antagonised state is to combine their use and be applied as integrative medicine.

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