

# What Doctors Should Know about CAM

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*Most of the information in this document has been taken directly from Freeman, Lynda W, Ph.D. et al's Best Practices in Complementary and Alternative Medicine. Freeman's addresses physician CAM concerns and issues, and has reviewed more than 4,000 clinically controlled trials on the effects of alternative therapies as health intervention, and has identified more than 9,000 trials in her literature.*

*The founder of Chi Fountain, Mikiko Murakami, along with Rene Alvarez, M.D. and Mallika Singh, Ph.D., has also compiled well-designed studies for many of the modalities offered by Chi Fountain. Go to [www.chifountain.com](http://www.chifountain.com) to download this information or call 415.212.0115.*

*Chi Fountain also continues to work directly with researchers at California Pacific Medical Center in order to provide patients and health professionals with the most updated information in regards to integrating CAM into conventional health care.*

## 0. OUTLINE

1. What is CAM?
2. US CAM Market
3. What the health professional needs to know to understand CAM therapies
4. The necessity for health professionals to adapt to the unavoidable integration of CAM
5. Liability Concerns
6. Health insurance
7. References

## 1. WHAT IS CAM?

Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM), as defined by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM), is a group of diverse medical and health care systems, practices, and products that are not presently considered to be part of conventional medicine. The list of what is considered to be CAM changes continually, as those therapies that are proven to be safe and effective become adopted into conventional health care and as new approaches to health care emerge.

CAM is not intended to replace traditional medical care, but meant to augment and support health in the areas where traditional medicine alone has often proved unsatisfactory. A study done by Dr. Eisenberg in 1997 clearly reported that individuals were not replacing regular medical care with alternative therapies. Combining the strengths of both forms of medicine benefit both the patient and the health care provider. Understanding the benefits and limitations of alternative therapies will help the health professional understand and protect their patients from complications that may arise when various treatment methods are carelessly combined.

There are studies to show that CAM is beneficial for **acute** and **chronic conditions**, as well as for **preventative health care**. When used to treat **acute conditions**, such as labor pain, postpartum depression, pregnancy-induced and chemotherapy-induced nausea, and surgical or procedural pain, CAM therapies work by affecting pain receptors, improving immune function, producing pharmacologic effects, increasing endorphin release, adjusting spine, or manipulating muscle tissue. Mind-body interventions succeed by teaching the patient how to affect changes in his or her own biochemical and physiologic responses. **Chronic conditions** that have been reported to improve with the use of alternative therapies include cardiovascular disease, hypertension, asthma, ulcers, HIV and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), epilepsy, anxiety, depression, insomnia, back pain, headaches, and drug and alcohol addiction. Dr. Eisenberg's 1997 survey showed that 42% of all alternative therapies used were exclusively attributed to the treatment of



existing illness, where as 58% were used in order to **prevent future illness**. Many Americans take supplements and receive alternative therapies to maintain their vitality and health.

## **2. US CAM MARKET**

As of 2002, CAM is a \$30 billion industry, which is growing at 15% a year. More than half of U.S. adults now go outside the health system for alternative care. They make more than 600 million visits to non-conventional healers per year, and spend out-of-pocket money to receive treatments. Future growth is fueled by an aging population, medical schools starting to offer CAM courses, hospitals and medical centers offering CAM modalities, health insurance covering CAM services, and increasing awareness of the benefits of CAM among the general population.

CAM therapies are being used for acute and chronic conditions, as well as for the prevention of future illnesses. Four out of five patients believe that using CAM therapies in conjunction with traditional medicine is far superior to either discipline alone (“Patients don’t use it to replace traditional care”; Medical Economics; Ordell: Oct 22, 2001; Joan R Rose). Less than 4 out of 10 tell their doctors of outside treatments they are receiving, causing potential problems such as herbal treatments conflicting with western prescriptions.

## **3. WHAT THE HEALTH PROFESSIONAL NEEDS TO KNOW TO UNDERSTAND CAM THERAPIES**

To understand complementary medicine and the consequences and effects that alternative therapies produce in the health care industry today, the health professional must be able to:

- a. Define the terms commonly used in the fields of CAM
- b. Comprehend the modalities that make up the major alternative therapies
- c. Assess the prevalence of alternative therapy use in the US market
- d. Determine what types of patients use alternative therapies
- e. Understand the reasons it is important for health care professionals to be knowledgeable about alternative therapies

This document attempts to address all of the above. If patients are using CAM, and research studies confirm they are, conscientious health would greatly benefit by understanding the benefits and risks of alternative forms of care. Medical providers should not only understand CAM, but also be able to query their patients about their usage of CAM. Chi Fountain provides medical providers with educational materials, research, and counseling options, so that they can provide integrative health care to their patients. All Chi Fountain patients have transportable patient folders so that the patients can show their other health professionals the CAM treatment progress reports they receive from Chi Fountain practitioners.

## **4. THE NECESSITY FOR HEALTH PROFESSIONALS TO ADAPT TO THE GROWING INTEGRATION OF CAM**

The commitment of U.S. citizens to CAM is powerful, and this commitment is expected to increase at 15% per year. Would it be easier to simply advise patients to avoid alternative therapies? The obvious answer is that patients will continue to explore and use CAM regardless. Secondly, there is considerable benefit demonstrated from a variety of alternative treatments. In fact, the reason most patients seek out alternative therapies is because the more traditional methods have failed to give symptom relief or the quality of life benefits they desired.



The Journal of the American Medical Association did a 1998 survey which evaluated U.S. medical schools found that (1-1:7) 64% now offer some type of CAM course and of the 123 courses reported, 68% are stand-alone electives and 31% are part of required courses. Conventional health care professionals can stay current by educating themselves on CAM or being able to provide patients with educational, counseling, and treatment options for CAM.

As more than ½ of US patients are already using CAM, legal protection exists for both the individual health professional and health care organization in understanding as much as possible about alternative medicine. Physicians may be at risk of liability if they fail to inquire about complementary use. The American Medical Association in its draft Report of the Council on Scientific Affairs on Alternative Medicine recommended that physicians routinely inquire about patient use of complementary medicine and teach themselves and their patients about the scientific knowledge related to alternative therapy. This recommendation is equally applicable for other health professionals. By understanding CAM and being able to refer out to CAM practitioners, health professionals will be able to:

- a. Increase patient satisfaction, patient trust, and patient communication
- b. Increase safe treatment capabilities
- c. Abide by ethical responsibilities as health professionals
  1. **Respect** for persons: in demonstrating respect for the patient, health care professionals have an obligation to discuss treatment alternatives
  2. **Nonmaleficence**: Nonmaleficence refers to the “do no harm” credo of medicine. The vast majority of CAM modalities have low-risk profiles, thus maintaining the medical provider’s ethical commitment to nonmaleficence.
  3. **Beneficence**: Health professionals have an obligation to help patients achieve optimal health, which means paying attention to preventative approaches, prolonging *meaningful* life, and reducing patient suffering.
  4. **Justice**: the theme of justice in health care also relates to fairness. Justice suggests that patients should have fair access to all forms of treatment that can improve their condition and quality of life.

Chi Fountain ensures the high quality and caring nature of its CAM practitioners, and is committed to working in an integrative manner with other medical providers. **All medical providers’ treatment services will always be honored.**

## 5. LIABILITY CONCERNS

Enhanced communication prevents problems resulting from incompatible forms of treatment. Chi Fountain communicates risks that exist for CAM and the individual practitioners assume liability for their interventions. Chi Fountain practitioners work under HIPAA guidelines and have mal-practice insurance. Chi Fountain clients sign patient-consent forms to minimize liability.

### Medical Malpractice Concerns

As a rule, simply referring a patient to another health profession does not expose the physician to liability. This rule has generally been applied throughout the country in cases involving physician referrals.

## 6. HEALTH INSURANCE, MEDICAL, MEDICARE, WORKMAN’S COMP

A March 1999 Landmark Health study, which surveyed 114 senior HMO executives from 449 organizations, found the following:

- a. 67 % of HMO’s offer at least one form of alternative health care, usually chiropractic (65%) or acupuncture (31%) services
- b. HMO’s identify acupuncture (97%), herbal therapy (96%), acupressure (89%), and massage therapy (88%) as the modalities most often associated with alternative care. Although 57% also consider chiropractic as alternative care, 43% consider it to be mainstream.



- c. Among HMOs that offer alternative therapy, 48% of all members have coverage. Within the next 2 to 3 years, 56% of the membership will have coverage.
- d. HMOs that offer alternative care admit they do so because members, employers, and groups asked for it (48%); because it is required by law or mandate (38%); because it is clinically effective (8%); because it differentiates them from the competitors (7%); because it enables them to meet the competition (5%); because it attracts new members (4%).
- e. Approximately 85% of HMOs believe the relationship between traditional and alternative medical care will grow closer; 47% perceive the relationship as “complementary”

American Specialty Health Plans, the largest CAM provider in the United States, has affiliate programs with major health insurance companies, such as Blue Cross, Blue Shield, Kaiser, Aetna, and HealthNet.

**Some of the Chi Fountain services are covered by insurance. Chi Fountain practitioners can provide Super Bills for many of the services and Workman’s Comp cases are accepted. Please call 415.212.0115 to have the patients talk to our practitioners about coverage.**

## **6. REFERENCES**

1. Freeman, Lynda W, Ph.D. et al. Best Practices in Complementary and Alternative Medicine. Maryland: Aspen Publishers, 2001.
2. Rose, Joan R. “Patients don’t use it to replace traditional care.” Medical Economics. Ordell, Oct 22, 2001.
3. Spencer, John, Ph.D. and Jacobs, Joseph J., M.D., M.B.A. Complementary/Alternative Medicine: An Evidence-Based Approach. Missouri: Mosby Inc., 1999.

