

Complementary and Alternative Methods (CAM) of Health Care

1. Most common health care system in the United States is the biomedical or “Western” system
2. Based on evaluating the physical signs and symptoms of a patient, determining the cause of disease, and treating the cause.
3. Major trend is an increase in the use of complementary or alternative health care therapies
 - a. Complementary therapies: methods of treatment used in conjunction with conventional medical therapies
 - b. Alternative therapies: methods of treatment used in place of biomedical therapies
 - i. Term alternative is usually applied whether or not the therapy is used in place of or in conjunction with conventional medical therapies
4. Integrative (Integrated) Health Care
 - a. Offered by many health care facilities
 - b. Uses both mainstream medical treatments and CAM therapies to treat a patient
 - c. Example: chronic pain is treated with both medications and CAM therapies that encourage stress reduction and relaxation
 - d. Based on the principle that individuals have the ability to bring greater wellness and healing into their own lives and that the mind affects the healing process
 - e. Recognizes that each person is unique and may require different medical treatments and a variety of CAM therapies
 - f. Integrative treatment plan must be individualized to meet the patient’s own special needs and circumstances
5. Interest in holistic health care has increased the use of CAM therapies
 - a. Consider the whole individual and recognize that the health of each part has an effect on the person’s total health status
 - b. Believe that each person has a life force or special type of energy that can be used in the healing process
 - c. Skilled practitioners, rituals, and specialized practices are a part of the therapy
 - d. Many therapies are based on cultural values and beliefs
6. Examples of CAM practitioners
 - a. Ayurvedic practitioners
 - i. Use an ancient philosophy, ayurveda, developed in India to determine a person’s predominant dosha (body type)
 - ii. Prescribe diet, herbal treatment, exercise, yoga, massage, minerals, and living practices to restore and maintain harmony in the body
 - b. Chinese medicine practitioners
 - i. Use an ancient holistic-based healing practice based on the belief that a life energy (Chi) flows through every living person in an invisible system of meridians (pathways) to link the organs together and connect them to the external environment or universe
 - ii. When the flow of Chi is blocked health issues/pain occurs
 - iii. Use acupuncture, acupressure, tai chi, and herbal remedies to maintain the proper flow of energy and promote health
 - c. Chiropractors
 - i. Believes that the brain sends vital energy to all body parts through nerves in the spinal cord
 - ii. Misalignment of the vertebrae (bones) places pressure on spinal nerves, which results in disease and pain

- iii. Use spinal manipulation, massage, and exercise to adjust the position of the vertebrae and restore the flow of energy
 - d. Homeopaths
 - i. Believe in the ability of the body to heal itself through the actions of the immune system
 - ii. Uses minute, diluted doses of drugs made from plant, animal, and mineral substances to cause symptoms similar to the disease and to activate the immune system
 - e. Hypnotists
 - i. Help an individual obtain a trance-like state with the belief that the person will be receptive to verbal suggestions and able to make a desired behavior change
 - f. Naturopaths
 - i. Use only natural therapies such as fasting, special diets, lifestyle changes, and supportive approaches to promote healing; avoid the use of surgery or medicinal agents to treat disease
- 7. Many different therapies are used in CAM medicine
 - a. Most of the therapies are noninvasive and holistic
 - b. In many instances, they are less expensive than other traditional treatments
 - c. Insurance programs may cover a wide variety of CAM therapies
- 8. National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM)
 - a. Established by the federal government at the National Institutes of Health in 1992
 - b. Purpose is to research the various therapies and determine standards of quality care
 - c. Many states have passed laws to govern the use of various therapies
 - d. Establish standards for some therapies
 - e. Forbid the use of some therapies
 - f. Label specific therapies experimental
 - g. Require a license or certain educational requirements before a practitioner can administer a particular therapy
 - h. Essential to learn the legal requirements of your state regarding the different CAM therapies
- 9. Remember: patients have the right to choose their own type of care; a nonjudgmental attitude is essential
- 10. As more individuals choose to use one or more of these forms of treatment, it will be important for healthcare providers to become aware of these methods of treatment