

## National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine

Medical strategies, procedures, products and systems that are not considered part of the conventional practice of medicine are deemed as alternative or complementary medicine (CAM). Conventional medicine has been traditionally practiced by those individuals that hold MD or OD degrees and their allied health professionals but some medical professionals practice both conventional and CAM.

There is a distinction between complementary and alternative medicine. Complementary medicine is used along with conventional medicine as a supplement. Alternative medicine is used in the place of conventional medicine. There exists some scientific evidence about the effects of CAM, but still many questions remain as to the safe and effective use of these therapies and whether they actually work for the medical condition that they are intended to treat.

Often dental patients report in their medical histories, using CAM therapies. As dental health professions we need to be aware of the existing CAM therapies, the scientific evidence available and any interactions these therapies might have with dental treatment. The National Institutes of Health have established a center which supports the investigation and dissemination of knowledge about CAM. The website for this center is maintained at the following URL: <http://nccam.nih.gov/>. The NIHs mission for this center is as follows:

“The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) is dedicated to exploring complementary and alternative healing practices in the context of rigorous science; training complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) researchers; and disseminating authoritative information to the public and professionals.

To fulfil its mission, the NCCAM supports a broad-based portfolio of research, research training and educational grants and contracts, as well as various outreach mechanisms to disseminate information” (<http://www.nih.gov/about/almanac/organization/NCCAM.htm>).

The homepage for this website has many topics that can be accessed either by clicking on the link across the top of the page or under each topic heading. These topics include: 1) *Health Information*, 2) *Research*, 3) *News and Events*, 4) *Clinical Trials*, 5) *Training* and 6) *About NCCAM*. Each of these topic headings has a wealth of information for the consumer, health

professional and researcher. There is also access to this site information in Spanish.

The *Health Information* section contains information and links to popular strategies and products. This section can be browsed by topics or conditions. It is also available in Spanish. The *Research* section gives information on research opportunities and funding mechanisms. It also provides a section for applying for a research grant. In addition, it contains published research on CAM.

The *News and Events* section contains a news area, as well as a meeting and lecture section and an advisories and alerts section. Current press releases can also be found here. This section also contains the present and past issues of a newsletter and scientific highlights about CAM.

The *Clinical Trials* section provides up to date information on current clinical trials both in Bethesda and throughout the country. It contains detailed information about clinical trials, and policies and guidelines for researchers.

The section on *Training* contains a wealth of information on becoming a researcher. It provides information on training and development, applying for training grants and online continuing education. Information about training sites is available here and additional resources about research opportunities are also provided. The final section on *About NCCAM* gives the reader the information on the history and mission of this organization. It is also where the financial and structural information about the organization is placed. This section gives visitor information and how to get involved in research.

This website is very easy to navigate and can be a good resource for the practitioner to find current and valuable information about CAM. As more and more patients come into the dental office being medicated with nonconventional therapies, this website can provide a much needed resource for the dental profession.

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