

THE ROLE OF ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE IN MODERN HEALTHCARE

The aim of study was to determine the role and place of alternative medicine in modern medical science, to examine its principles and types as well as some popular alternative medical treatments.

Alternative medicine is any medical treatment that is not part of conventional evidence-based medicine, such as one would learn in medical school, nursing school or even paramedic training.

Alternative medicine exists in all cultures to some degree and terms such as traditional medicine, indigenous medicine or folk medicine etc. are used to describe such practices. These medicines date back hundred or even thousands of years depending on the country and culture concerned.

Alternative medicine consists of a wide range of health care practices, products, and therapies and their accompanying theories and beliefs, other than those intrinsic to the dominant health system of a particular society or culture in a given historical period.

There are more than 100 systems of alternative medicines still in practice all over the world. Every country, region or area has its own traditional system of health and medical cares such as for the Chinese it is acupuncture, for the French, magnetic healing; for the Germans, Heilpraxis; for the English, Herbalism; for India, Ayurveda with Siddha being widely practice in the southern part of the country; for Japan, Shiatsu etc.[6]

Why do people use alternative medicine? There are many personal, spiritual and medical reasons why people choose alternative treatment over the traditional, conventional approach. These reasons are: had negative experiences in the past with conventional medicine; spiritual or religious reasons; wariness of chemicals and toxins; preference of the holistic approach; focus on prevention.[4]

Alternative medicine is based on such principles as prevention is better than cure; attaining optimal health; patient is a person not a disease; individualistic approach; radical removal of disease.

There are five major groups of alternative therapies: Energy Medicine, Biology Based Practices, Manipulative and body-based practices, Mind-body interventions and Whole Medical Practices.

Energy Medicine. Energy medicine is a domain that deals with putative and verifiable energy fields (Biofield therapies such as Qi gong & Reiki or therapeutic touch and bioelectromagnetic-based therapies such as magnetic fields). The goal of these therapies is to unblock or re-balance your energy force.

Biology Based Practices. Examples include dietary supplements and herbal remedies. These treatments use ingredients found in nature. Examples of herbs include ginseng, ginkgo and echinacea; examples of other dietary supplements include selenium, glucosamine sulfate and SAME. Herbs and supplements can be taken as teas, oils, syrups, powders, tablets or capsules.[3]

Manipulative and body-based practices feature manipulation or movement of body parts, such as is done in chiropractic and osteopathic manipulation, massage and acupuncture.

Mind-body interventions. Mind-body techniques strengthen the communication between your mind and your body and spirit. Examples of mind-body connection techniques include meditation, prayer, relaxation and art therapies. It works under the premise that the mind can affect "bodily functions and symptoms".

Whole Medical Practices. Examples of whole medical systems include ancient healing systems. These healing systems arose long before conventional Western medicine and include Ayurveda from India and traditional Chinese medicine.

The most popular forms of alternative medicine are Ayurveda, Homeopathy, Naturopathy, Yoga, Acupuncture, Acupressure, Magneto therapy, Shiatsu, Iridology, Reflexology, Herbalism, Meditation, Aromatherapy, Chromo therapy, Diet therapy, Massage Therapeutic, Hydropathy and Reiki.

Homeopathy is a form of alternative medicine based upon principles first defined by Samuel Hahnemann in 1796. A central thesis of homeopathy is that an ill person can be treated using a substance that can produce, in a healthy person, symptoms similar to those of the illness. Homeopathy can treat a wide range of illnesses such as infertility, period problems, menopause, pregnancy issues, migraines, skin complaints, allergies, hay-fever, IBS, depression, stress, anxiety, sleep problems. Homeopathy is suitable for everyone – babies, children, and adults.

Reflexology. This modality is based on the idea that specific points on the feet and hands correspond with organs and tissues throughout the body. With fingers and thumbs, the practitioner applies pressure to these points to treat a wide range of stress-related illnesses.

Naturopathy. This approach focuses on noninvasive treatments to help your body do its own healing and uses a variety of practices, such as massage, acupuncture, herbal remedies, exercise and lifestyle counseling. (Traditional Chinese, Ayurveda, homeopathy and naturopathic medicine).[1]

Ayurvedic medicine is a very comprehensive system that places equal emphasis on body, mind, and spirit and uses a highly personalized approach to return an individual to a state where a person is again in harmony with their environment. Ayurvedic medicine uses diet, exercise, yoga, meditation, massage, herbs, and medication and, despite its long lineage, is as applicable today as it was 5000 years ago. Evolving throughout its history, Ayurveda remains an influential system of medicine in South Asia.

Acupuncture. It is a major part of Traditional Chinese Medicine. Fine needles are inserted at specific points to stimulate, disperse, and regulate the flow of vital energy, and restore a healthy energy balance. It is used to treat a wide range of conditions including back pain, sciatica, muscular injuries, arthritis, Irritable Bowel Syndrome(IBS), menstrual disorders, infertility, sinusitis, asthma, hay-fever, skin problems, smoking addiction, stress, fatigue, insomnia, and migraine.

Hydrotherapy. It is defined as the scientific application of water for therapeutic purposes. Water may be used at various temperatures, in different modes and in different forms. It is used in treatment of different conditions, including arthritis and related rheumatic complaints.[2]

Chiropractic. The chiropractic views the spine as the backbone of human health: misalignments of the vertebrae caused by poor posture or trauma cause pressure on the spinal nerve roots, leading to diminished function and illness. Through manipulation or adjustment of the spine, treatment seeks to analyze and correct these misalignments.

Reiki. Practitioners of this ancient Tibetan healing system use light hand placements to channel healing energies to the recipient. While practitioners may vary widely in technique and philosophy, Reiki is commonly used to treat emotional and mental distress as well as chronic and acute physical problems, and to assist the recipient in achieving spiritual focus and clarity.

Alternative medicine has been a source of vigorous debate, even over the definition of alternative medicine. It is considered that alternative medicine is based on untested, untraditional, or unscientific principles, methods, treatments. But a growing number of people are turning to alternative medicine and natural healing and even some mainstream doctors have begun to recommend natural drugless therapies to treat both everyday complaints and serious illnesses. So alternative approaches are often used in conjunction with conventional (official) medicine.[5]

There are numerous advantages of alternative medicine. But what to choose a prescribed medicine or alternative therapies -it's up to you to decide.

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