

Complementary and Alternative Medicine

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The following is an abstract. The article will be updated in the 2013 edition of the encyclopedia.

Complementary, alternative, integrative, and experimental medicine are defined, and the classification of CAM (complementary and alternative medicine) is discussed. Official documents on ethics in the U.S. discuss ethics in terms of types of potential harm: economic harm from spending money on futile therapies, indirect harm caused by avoiding efficacious conventional therapies or having hopes raised falsely, and direct harm caused by negative side effects of CAM therapies. Issues involving the clinician's obligation to inform patients about CAM options and obligation to treat with CAM or continue to follow patients who pursue CAM options are reviewed. Ethical issues also emerge because the strategy of using evidence-based medicine is limited by the lack of funding for research on non-patented therapies. Finally, there are ethical issues involving professional power relations. Whereas conventional medical researchers and clinicians often view the relatively weak evidence for many CAM therapies as the responsibility of CAM clinicians, the latter argue that their work has been systematically suppressed and underfunded. Surveys continue to document high levels of patient utilization, but federal government funding for CAM research amounts to less than 1 percent of funding for conventional medicine.