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COMPLIMENTARY MEDICINE BY RICHARD J. CLOFINE, DO

Complementary medical practice is one that expands the treatment repertoire beyond those methods taught at American medical schools. It allows alternative unconventional healing modalities and conventional western medicine to complement one another for the benefit of the patient. Complementary Medicine strives to maintain a holistic balance in presenting healthcare options to individuals. Complementary medicine is really about providing a balanced approach to wellness that maintains an openness to all alternatives and to what has meaning in someone's life.

I was trained in conventional western medicine as a physician and surgeon. But from my personal life's path I knew that healing involved the whole individual: body, mind and spirit. The reason that alternative therapies are so popular in this country are that they fill a niche that conventional medicine is generally deficient in. And large numbers of Americans are seeking that niche.

Harvard University researchers reported on the year 1990 in a prestigious medical journal (ref). They found 1/3 of Americans utilize alternative methods (about 60 million people). Of those 20 million see alternative practitioners and most of these do not disclose that information to their medical doctors. They estimate that \$14 BILLION a year is spent out of pocket (i.e. NOT reimbursed by their insurance companies). Even if hugely inflated this clearly shows a large portion of the population find benefit from and wish to utilize these methods. Wouldn't it be nice if they could talk to their physicians about it?

True health is more than just a sound body and freedom from mental illness. It should imply that all aspects of our lives are free from ailment. That means a healthy mind and a life that is fulfilling and balanced in all aspects: psychologically, emotionally, socially and spiritually. The convention of modern western medicine is the best in the world for dealing with accidents, trauma, sudden medical disease and many chronic conditions. It is not perfect and MANY books and articles have been written about its short comings. In general it seems to fall short in those aspects of our lives that are not so easily subject to the scientific method: our emotions, our social interactions, our lifestyles and our spirit.

Alternative approaches are not perfect and are often criticized by establishment medicine. These critiques include that there are few scientific studies proving benefit, that the ideas behind the therapies do not fit the established scientific paradigm, that there is no licensing or control. Certainly some of these criticisms have aspects of merit, but the fact remains that people use these methods because they see their benefit in improving the overall quality of their lives.

Alternative healthcare methods are a great complement to the western medical approach. They often deal with the issues that conventional medicine doesn't. The issues of healthy living, mind-body interaction, creative thinking, self help, emotional and spiritual balance are fully confronted. Many of these practices are for the patient themselves to perform, empowering the individual toward self worth and the ability to change for the better. They are often rooted in age old traditional wisdom.

Healing interventions range on a continuum from aggressive measures associated with high-technology therapeutics to self applied gentle healing energies associated with paradigms of wholeness and unity with nature and the universe. On the one end the body is seen as a machine and on the other end the body is seen as reflection of the elements of the nature.



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THE HEALING CONTINUUM

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CHEMOTHERAPY PHARMACEUTICALS MANIPULATION MASSAGE TALK PRAYER
RADIATION ACCUPUNCTURE IMMERSIONS SONG MEDITATION
SHAMANISM AROMATHERAPY
HEALING CIRCLES

(more aggressive/technological) (less aggressive/natural)

None of these therapeutic modalities are inherently good or bad, rather it is the perspective of application that determines their benefit to a particular situation. For example, I can take a knife out of my kitchen drawer and use it to help feed my family, carve a beautiful sculpture, or murder my next door neighbor. The knife (which represents any modality, high or low tech) is not inherently good or bad. It is the perspective of application that determines the outcome. In the same way, when used at the right time and place all modalities have benefit and none are mutually exclusive (i.e. there is no reason why modalities on different ends of the continuum cannot be utilized together).

So what determines when to use what?? That is dependent on many issues including risk/benefit ratio's, paradigms and past experiences of the patient and practitioner, availability and cost. Obviously these factors will be different for each therapy as applied to each patient. Healing must be individualized and the less dogma and more openness applied to the circumstances, the more is available to be of benefit to the person. ANY therapy can be harmful when not applied from the appropriate perspective.

A circle is being drawn, the groundwork is being laid. For a new medicine that is not restricted by dogma to one modality. No individual practitioner can be expert in all modalities. All practitioners can remain open to anything that is perceived by the person as beneficial to their overall well being.

Reference: Unconventional Medicine in the United States. Prevalence, Costs and Patterns of Use. D.M. Eisenberg M.D., et.al., New England Journal of Medicine, Vol.328, #4; 1/28/93