

A MESSAGE *From the Director*

Over the past year, I have had the privilege of leading the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) in a careful assessment of how developments in science, medicine, and health care should shape the Center's strategic directions. The process included scientific workshops, symposia, think tanks, and extensive consultation with our highly diverse stakeholder community.

The result of this year-long dialogue is this, our third strategic plan, which articulates goals and objectives for the coming years and presents a structure for determining priorities for future research. At its core is a vision in which rigorous scientific evidence about complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) informs both the decisions Americans make regarding CAM use and the potential for integration of CAM interventions into health care.

NCCAM's first decade was a period of rapid growth in which we studied a wide array of CAM modalities. As we move into our second decade, we will build on this foundation by focusing a portion of our efforts on study of specific CAM approaches that show the greatest promise to improve upon existing treatment and health promotion strategies.

As in the past, our plan emphasizes the importance of basic and clinical research as the core of building the evidence base for CAM. But in this plan, we give increased emphasis to translational research and bringing the methods of effectiveness and outcomes research to the real world where public use is extensive.

We maintain a strong commitment to providing objective and authoritative evidence-based information to the public and health care professionals. We will continue efforts to build state-of-the-art research capacity through targeted training and career development programs, and through fostering multidisciplinary collaborations.

My experience as a physician who has cared for patients struggling with chronic, painful, and debilitating symptoms greatly informs my perspective on our work. When I began medical school, one of my teachers taught that "the secret of care of the patient is in caring for the patient."* I took these words to heart. Symptoms matter, and few would dispute the fact that modern medicine does not always succeed in alleviating them. Few would also dispute the need for better approaches for encouraging healthy lifestyle choices. These are places in which I believe CAM-inclusive approaches offer promise, and I look forward to exploring the possibilities in the years ahead.

Josephine P. Briggs, M.D.
Director



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* Quote by Herman Blumgart in Bennett MJ. *The Empathic Healer: An Endangered Species?* San Diego, CA: Academic Press; 2001.