

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 5

DEVELOP AND DISSEMINATE OBJECTIVE, EVIDENCE-BASED INFORMATION ON CAM INTERVENTIONS

Public interest in CAM remains strong. Helping the public and health care providers to be better informed about the safety and usefulness (or lack thereof) of CAM interventions, practices, and disciplines is the overarching communication goal of NCCAM.

The translation and dissemination of evidence-based health information to the public and health care providers is a key component of the mission of NIH. Thus, it is essential that the public have ready access to the authoritative, unbiased health and medical information that NIH produces every day.

As a component of NIH, NCCAM shares in the mandate to communicate regularly about research advances and present the most current health and science information on CAM and integrative medicine. Two facts underscore the central importance of NCCAM's information activities. First, they usually concern evidence regarding products or practices that are readily available and widely used by the general public; second, many are used as self-care interventions, without the advice or guidance of a health care provider—whether conventional or CAM.





Challenges and Needs

NCCAM shares with its sister NIH ICs many of the challenges of translating and delivering complex scientific information to an interested public. In this regard, two features of the landscape of complementary and alternative medicine in the United States are noteworthy.

First, the public domain is deluged with information about CAM, some of it overtly promotional and much of it either not based on evidence or of questionable quality and reliability. Second, NCCAM's constituencies include consumers who are curious about what the science says, as well as individuals with strong, often polar-opposite beliefs or biases regarding the state of evidence about particular CAM interventions—or even the need for CAM research. Thus, the same evidence-based information can appear to some as promoting unproven or dangerous practices and to others as discrediting practices with proven safety and value.

In this context, NCCAM must ensure that its presentation of the evidence is scientifically objective and appropriately balances what is known about risk and benefit. Most importantly, it must provide information that is of value to the public and health care providers given the reality of widespread and frequent self-care use of CAM.

Strategies

Strategy 5.1: Provide reliable, objective, and evidence-based information to help the public make informed decisions about CAM.

NCCAM seeks to provide an objective voice to help the public and providers make informed decisions about CAM use.

Given the quantity of information available to the public about CAM, NCCAM seeks to provide an objective voice to help the public and providers make informed health care decisions. NCCAM uses a variety of communication techniques and technologies to explain to the public what is known about the science of CAM without bias or preconceived ideas and to provide an accurate and balanced perspective on the promise, as well as the concerns, of using CAM. The Center also collaborates with both domestic and international agencies and organizations to share information and leverage communication resources.

The field of communications evolves rapidly. NCCAM will continue to provide information in a variety of formats to its audiences through multiple channels, including the Web, broadcast and print media, its clearinghouse and exhibit program, and social media. The Internet is a key source of information, with 8 in 10 Internet users (or two-thirds of U.S. adults) looking online for health

Information—An Evolving Landscape

To ensure that authoritative and evidence-based CAM information is reaching the public, NCCAM employs emerging technologies and platforms including video, social media, and mobile applications.

Conveying information about the safety of CAM therapies is vital to NCCAM's goal of improving health and health care. Thus, NCCAM conveys FDA safety alerts through its Web site, e-mail newsletters, and social media profiles.



information. Online communities are continuously springing up, bringing together groups of people who share information and resources with each other. Social networking sites are replacing the standard search engines as the most frequent destinations for online users. Mobile phones and other devices are fast replacing personal computers. To ensure that those interested in CAM research find NCCAM's information, it is incumbent on the Center to use these emerging technologies.

Importantly, as the evidence base continues to evolve, NCCAM will be able to draw more and more on the evidence-based interpretations or conclusions of independent organizations and professional societies. NCCAM will collaborate with these and other third-party organizations and other Government

Outreach to Health Care Providers

The Internet has become an indispensable information tool for health care providers. According to a recent study, providers turn to online resources for health information above any other source, and physicians spend an average of 8 hours online each week for professional purposes. For information on CAM practices, health care providers need reliable, evidence-based information about safety and effectiveness so they can help manage patient care and promote health

and well-being. In response to this need, NCCAM has designed a portal on its Web site specifically for health care providers. This Web portal provides links to scientific literature on CAM, including reviews from the Cochrane Collaboration, as well as clinical practice guidelines issued by third-party organizations and online continuing education modules.



NCCAM's Web portal for health care providers (nccam.nih.gov/health/providers/)

agencies to improve the quality and depth of information that reaches its many stakeholder audiences and to maximize opportunities to leverage communication resources.

Finally, NCCAM will strive to address its information and resources primarily to the large majority of consumers and health care providers who are curious about what the science says, even when the evidence is inconclusive or does not lead to clear guidance. To accomplish this, NCCAM will continue to work actively with its diverse community of stakeholders to identify, understand, and address the CAM information needs of consumers and health care providers and their concerns about accuracy or interpretation of research results and health messages.

Strategy 5.2: Provide reliable, objective, and evidence-based information about CAM to help health care providers manage care and provide advice.

Health care professionals—both conventional and CAM—also confront many challenges in accessing current scientific information about CAM. Recognizing

these challenges, NCCAM has developed information resources targeted toward the needs of this important audience. These resources include specialized communications, an exhibit program, outreach to professional societies, and online tools, including a dedicated Web portal that summarizes research findings and provides links to relevant clinical practice guidelines. These communication efforts will help ensure that health care providers have reliable information and authoritative resources on CAM. Ultimately, these efforts will also facilitate evidence-based integration of CAM practices shown to be useful and safe into comprehensive programs of health care and health promotion.

Strategy 5.3: Enable informed and integrative dialogue between consumers and health care providers about CAM use and the support of healthier lifestyles.

A 2006 NCCAM/AARP survey of individuals age 50 or older revealed that while more than two-thirds of respondents used some form of CAM, less than one-third of CAM users had talked to their physicians about CAM. The main reasons given for not talking about CAM use were that respondents did not know they should discuss CAM and that their physicians never asked.

Safe and well-integrated health care requires partnership involving the person and all of his or her health care providers—whether conventional or CAM. In an effective partnership, communication is clear and open among the various parties about the full range of health care interventions and the health practices the individual is using.

NCCAM's Time to Talk campaign provides tools to facilitate conversation about CAM use between health care providers and patients. NCCAM will explore expansion of this program to additional audiences—including CAM providers and a more diverse community of consumers—as well as harnessing new communication channels and technologies to enhance this important dialogue.

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