

Advising patients who seek alternative medical therapies.

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Advising Patients Who Seek Alternative Medical Therapies

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Abstract

Alternative medical therapies, such as chiropractic, acupuncture, homeopathy, and herbal remedies, are in great public demand. Some managed care organizations now offer these therapies as an “expanded benefit.” Because the safety and efficacy of these practices remain largely unknown, advising patients who use or seek alternative treatments presents a professional challenge. A step-by-step strategy is proposed whereby conventionally trained medical providers and their patients can proactively discuss the use or avoidance of alternative therapies. This strategy involves a formal discussion of patients' preferences and expectations, the maintenance of symptom diaries, and follow-up visits to monitor for potentially harmful situations. In the absence of professional medical and legal guidelines, the proposed management plan emphasizes

patient safety, the need for documentation in the patient record, and the importance of shared decision making.

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Published: *Ann Intern Med.* 1997;127(1):61-69.

DOI: 10.7326/0003-4819-127-1-199707010-00010

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Print ISSN: 0003-4819 | Online ISSN: 1539-3704

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