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Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology

Volume 123, Issue 2, February 2009, Pages 309-316.e4

Reviews and feature article

Complementary and alternative medicine for the allergist-immunologist: Where do I start?

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaci.2009.01.001>

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Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) therapies present a growing information management challenge for physicians because nearly 40% of their patients may be using and another 50% may be considering use of CAM as part of their healthcare regimen. The National Health Statistics Reports for 2007 described the most commonly used nonvitamin, nonmineral therapy as natural products (eg, herbals at 17.7%). More than 5% of children under the age of 18 years used CAM for allergic conditions including asthma. The amount and quality of information available and concerns about liability risk represent a challenge for most physicians. This review focuses on considerations for approaching a CAM-related consultation, incorporating legal and logistic factors affecting how such an encounter should be approached. A 10-step process is presented that addresses different components of CAM consultations and what should be documented. Access to timely, high-quality information regarding product specific efficacy and safety data, as found in the Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database, is

needed to support CAM consultation efficiently. Understanding of serious adverse events associated with CAM is limited; an international need exists for improved safety surveillance and information sharing. Allergy-immunology, as a specialty with expertise in adverse drug reaction evaluation and management, has a unique opportunity to support enhanced CAM-related adverse events evaluations, reporting, and research.



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Key words

Complementary and alternative medicine; integrative medicine; herbals; herbs; adverse reactions; risk communication; quality of care

Abbreviations used

CAM, Complementary and alternative medicine; FDA, Food and Drug Administration; NCCAM, National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine; NIH, National Institutes of Health

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Disclosure of potential conflict of interest: J. M. Jellin is president of the Therapeutic Research

Center. P. J. Gregory is a consultant for the Therapeutic Research Center and has provided legal consultation or expert witness testimony on the topic of chelation therapy. The rest of the authors have declared that they have no conflict of interest.

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