

## Alternative Medicine And Its Important Role In Your Healthcare

Alternative Medicine is redefining the boundaries of individual health and well being and is beginning to change the definition of what it means to be healthy in today's fast-paced, stress-filled environment and offers a whole new realm of options for today's consumer to choose from in the process of determining their healthcare needs. You may be surprised to discover that Alternative Medicine may be covered in your healthcare policy, which offers a broader scope of coverage than managed care alone, and may well reduce your overall cost of healthcare in general and even improve the future quality of life that you and your family will enjoy in the years to come. The realization that the definition of health should be, and can be, far better than simply, free from injury or disease, represents a gradual shift in the way of thinking for both the consumer as well as the healthcare provider. It is this realization that is allowing Alternative Medicine to not only enter mainstream modern medicine, but also to partner with Conventional Medicine in a new and profound way as one of many successful avenues of treatment available to today's consumer of health. Fifteen to Twenty years ago, there were few recognized, alternatives to conventional medicine, at least not in the West. This is not to say that alternatives did not exist, quite the contrary, they were simply not considered a serious option in improving ones health. This is no longer the case. Dissatisfaction with the managed care system of the past decade, coupled with one important event and a slight shift in thinking created the perfect conditions for Alternative Medicine to flourish. First, the cost of healthcare skyrocketed. Rising costs for diagnostic and treatment of injury and disease fueled an inevitable shift in focus, primarily from treatment to prevention, and this created the perfect niche that would soon be filled by the proactive stance that Alternative Medicine prevention provides. Simply put, when costs rise people begin asking questions and seeking alternatives. Second, with the Information Age in full swing, access to quality information from a variety of sources translated into patients being better informed of healthcare issues and therefore more involved in their treatment options, if for no other reason than as a means to reduce their overall healthcare costs. Alternative Medicine and Conventional Medicine approach healthcare issues in very different ways. Conventional Medicine hinges on "the diagnosis of a patient's condition. This means that conventional medicine enters the healthcare process after the patient has been injured or after an ailment or disease has progressed to the level where an accurate diagnosis can be made. Once made, the diagnosis dictates both the treatment, accomplished via drug therapy and/or surgery, and the cost. Conventional Medicine exits the healthcare process once the malady has been identified, cured, or removed and is normally a temporary fix. Contrast this to Alternative Medicine, which is focused on "preventing a problem, meaning that Alternative Medicine by its very nature attempts, and prefers, to enter the healthcare process before the patient is injured or becomes ill. Prevention is the first line of defense. When this frontline is penetrated by injury or disease, Alternative Medicine makes every attempt to "assist the body in healing itself, via natural means, whenever and wherever possible. Alternative Medicine is thus non-invasive, even passive and more long-term, meaning that it becomes part of a consumer's healthcare regime and does not so quickly exit the health process, if at all. This will translate into lower costs for wellness over the lifespan of an individual. "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, and at no other time has this statement been more true, especially if the cure requires an expensive antibiotic, surgery and/or an extended, or even brief, hospital stay. Nutrition and lifestyle changes alone can easily reduce the incidence of costly injury and disease, decrease the need for costly maintenance medications and increase the likelihood of a better quality of life. The healthcare consumer of today is expected to be both well informed and totally involved in the decisions surrounding their personal health and well being. Not limited to local or even national healthcare options, the patient of this next century will enjoy global access to both information and treatment options. Healthcare policies are already positioning themselves for this global marketplace and are embracing Alternative Medicine as a means of lowering their own liability and costs as well as expanding their consumer pool. Consumers should make sure their healthcare policies reflect these changing attitudes and include a much broader spectrum of healthcare options. What is the quality of your health worth? Today's "non-traditional healthcare programs are the cornerstone of holistic health and the mainstay of the future quality of life that you and your family will enjoy in the years to come. Make sure your policy answers this question to the greatest satisfaction for you and your family.

### About the Author

The Journal of General Internal Medicine promotes improved patient care, research, and education in primary care. Its articles focus on topics.

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