



FOR
OCCUPATIONAL
THERAPY PRACTITIONERS

CAM: Not So Alternative Anymore

Holistic healing research supports efficacy in OT practice.

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By Mandy Lubas, OTR/L, and Emmy Vadnais, OTR/L

Complementary/alternative medicine (CAM) is, by definition, healthcare that falls outside of researched and "proven" methods of mainstream healthcare. This has been determined by our modern-day, mainstream medical system. We are seeing a trend of increased research for what has been considered alternative demonstrate efficacy and are seeing increased use of these approaches. Much of what has been considered CAM has deep roots in human history, and modern day research is now showing its effectiveness. With more and more research demonstrating its efficacy, these forms of care are becoming increasingly accepted as powerful and valid forms of care. More people are exploring and utilizing what has been considered CAM; approaches that address the mind, body, and spirit are increasingly being integrated into healthcare.

One reason for the mounting research was the creation in 1992 of the Office of Alternative Medicine within the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to investigate and evaluate promising unconventional medical practices. It has grown and is known today as the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM).

According to the NCCAM website, "The mission of NCCAM is to define, through rigorous scientific investigation, the usefulness and safety of complementary and alternative medicine interventions and their roles in improving health and health care. The Center's vision is that scientific evidence informs decision making by the public, by health care professionals, and by health policymakers regarding use and integration of these approaches" (www.nccam.nih.gov/about/ataglance).

More people are exploring and utilizing natural, holistic, and wellness approaches as they are dissatisfied with side effects of commonly prescribed medication; many are seeking to treat the root cause of what ails them versus treating only the symptoms.

Healthcare providers want to keep up with the public's interest and demand for integrating a variety of approaches into their care for maximum outcomes. More healthcare professionals are utilizing these approaches for their self care, family care, and pet care.

CAM has become an outdated term for many mind, body and spirit approaches, as research continues to pour in demonstrating their efficacy. We prefer to use the term "holistic health care" in place of CAM approaches which have research supporting their health benefits. One of the best aspects of holistic health care is that, when administered properly, it looks at the whole person and the approach is tailored to meet that individual's needs, versus a cookie-cutter or one-size-fits-all approach often seen in mainstream healthcare. This is one of the areas where OTs shine - treating the whole person.

How this Relates to OT Practice

Holistic approaches are a natural fit with OT practice. Occupational therapists are uniquely trained in addressing the whole person - the mind, body, and spirit. Therefore, we can become educated in holistic health care, gain clinical experience, and then educate our associations and insurance companies, train other health care professionals, and our communities. Through reading these research studies and through continuing education in mind, body, spirit approaches, we strongly believe that you can feel confident integrating Holistic Health Care in to OT practice.

The Bottom Line

OTs can feel confident billing these holistic approaches because of mounting holistic health care research. We can educate insurance companies that these modalities can assist with functional living skills. We can point to research demonstrating efficacy and our clients' progress. Healthcare facilities will see the cost effectiveness from using holistic health care because clients can have better outcomes more quickly, which means facilities will save money.

Research Studies

We have compiled a few research studies of holistic approaches that are being more commonly used and can be readily incorporated into OT practice for prevention, wellness, recovery and the journey of

life. When we began researching studies for this article we found thousands on holistic health care. Many studies have been published between 2001-2010, and the number continues to grow. The Research Resources section below can also assist you with resources for your own searches. The following are summaries of a few holistic health care studies that demonstrate how these approaches can be effective for overall health and well-being.

1. Aromatherapy

Cha JH, Lee SH, Yoo YS. (2010). Effects of aromatherapy on changes in the autonomic nervous system, aortic pulse wave velocity and aortic augmentation index in patients with essential hypertension. *Journal of Korean Academy of Nursing*. (2010) 40(5):705-13. doi: 10.4040/jkan.2010.40.5.705.

This study demonstrates that Aromatherapy is effective in lowering systolic blood pressure and sympathetic nervous system activity.

2. Ayurveda

Krishna, K.P.R. (2011) The efficacy of Ayurvedic treatment for rheumatoid arthritis: Cross-sectional experiential profile of a longitudinal study. *International Journal of Ayurveda Research*, 2(1), 8-13. This study looks at the efficacy of Ayurveda and its use in treating rheumatoid arthritis (RA). Findings indicate Ayurveda was effective in treating patients with RA. For those patients with severe functional limitation, significant improvement was shown in all parameters from admission to discharge.

3. Craniosacral Therapy (CST)

Matarán-Peñarrocha, GA, et. al. (2011). Influence of Craniosacral Therapy on Anxiety, Depression and Quality of Life in Patients with Fibromyalgia. *Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine*. Volume 2011, Article ID 178769, 9 pages doi:10.1093/ecam/nep125.

This study on craniosacral therapy shows that CST can assist patients with fibromyalgia by improving symptoms of anxiety and depression, and improving quality of life levels in these patients.

4. Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT)

Bougea A. M., et. al. (2013) Effect of the emotional freedom technique on perceived stress, quality of life, and cortisol salivary levels in tension-type headache sufferers: a randomized controlled trial. *Explore* (NY, 9(2):91-9. doi: 10.1016/j.explore.2012.12.005.

This study on Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) demonstrates that participants with tension headaches receiving the intervention had significantly reduced frequency and intensity of the headache episodes and lowered perceived stress levels and improved lifestyle factors.

5. Energy Healing

Abbott R., & Lavretsky H. (2013) Tai Chi and Qigong for the treatment and prevention of mental disorders. *Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, 36(1):109-19. doi: 10.1016/j.psc.2013.01.011.

Evidence is promising that t'ai chi and qigong may be effective in reducing depressive symptoms, stress, anxiety, and mood disturbances.

6. Guided Imagery

Page, S., Levine, P., Sisto, S., Johnston, M.V. (2001). A randomized efficacy and feasibility study of imagery in acute stroke. *Clinical Rehabilitation*, 15 no. 3, 233-240.

This study concluded that guided imagery can assist with motor deficits from a stroke, and is a clinically feasible, cost-effective form of therapy that may improve outcomes more than participation in movement therapy only.

7. Meditation

Sequeira S., & Ahmed, M. (2012). Meditation as a Potential Therapy for Autism: A Review. *Hindawi Publishing Corporation Autism Research and Treatment Volume*, Article ID 835847, 11 pages.

This study looks at meditation with children with autism and concluded that meditation can effectively strengthen self-control and character development simultaneously. These authors believe that mantra meditation would be useful with young children.

8. Yoga

Sherman, K.J., et. al. (2011). A Randomized Trial Comparing Yoga, Stretching, and a Self-care Book for Chronic Low Back Pain. *Archives of Internal Medicine*, 12, 171(22): 2019-2026.

This study on yoga shows that yoga classes improve function and reduce symptoms due low back pain; the benefits can last for several months.

Research Resources

These databases may be utilized when researching Holistic Health Care. Various Holistic Health Care association websites may also feature highlighted studies.

Databases:

- PubMed

- CINAHL
- AMED
- PsychInfo
- Web of Science
- EMBASE
- AOTA
- NCCAM

To connect with other OTs interested in and practicing holistic approaches and to learn more, join us once a month for our holistic OT phone conversation. Ask to join the e-mail list at emmy@emmyvadnais.com to receive updates on Holistic OT. Please 'like' our Holistic Occupational Therapy Facebook Page and join the conversation online at the Holistic Occupational Therapy Group page on Facebook. We look forward to connecting with you!

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