

The Reply:

Bartecchi expresses his concerns regarding the efficacy and costs of alternative therapies and implies that primary care physicians do not need to be knowledgeable about alternative and complementary therapies.

I believe that primary care physicians should have sufficient training to be knowledgeable about alternative therapies because nearly 40% of their patients use these therapies in addition to conventional therapy.^{1,2} The most common reason that patients seek alternative therapies is for treatment of chronic non-life-threatening disorders such as low back pain and other musculoskeletal pains.¹ The most commonly used alternative therapies for chronic pain are chiropractic, meditation, massage, and acupuncture.¹ Acupuncture has been shown to be effective in treating nausea and vomiting associated with chemotherapy³ and is used in many of our most respected cancer centers.

Primary care physicians should also be knowledgeable about dietary supplements because the majority of their patients take vitamins, minerals, or other supplements

Funding: None.

Conflict of Interest: The author has no conflict of interest associated with the work presented in this manuscript.

Authorship: The author had access to the data and wrote this manuscript.

which may interact with other prescribed medications.⁴ Wouldn't it be better for patients to receive guidance regarding dietary supplements from their physician rather than a health food store clerk?

At the present time, most alternative therapies are paid out of pocket. When these treatments are shown to be effective and safe, I believe that they should be covered by Medicare, Medicaid, and the other health insurers.

James E. Dalen, MD, MPH
*University of Arizona
College of Medicine
Tucson*

doi:10.1016/j.amjmed.2010.05.023

References

1. Barnes PM, Bloom B, Nahin RL. Complementary and alternative medicine use among adults and children: United States, 2007. National Health Statistics Reports; no. 12. Hyattsville, MD:National Center for Health Statistics, 2008.
2. Barnes P, Powell-Griner E, McFann K, Nahin R. CDC Advance Data Report #343. Complementary and alternative medicine use among adults: United States, 2002. May 27, 2004.
3. Acupuncture. National Institutes of Health Consensus Development Conference Statement 1997. Nov 3–5, 1997;15:1-34.
4. Council for Responsible Nutrition, 2009 <http://www.crnusa.org/botanicals>. Accessed April 3, 2010.