

FEATURE ARTICLE

An Integrative Approach to Addressing Clinical Issues in Complementary and Alternative Medicine in an Outpatient Oncology Center

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Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) is popular among patients with cancer and often is used in conjunction with conventional medicine, mostly without the knowledge or guidance of healthcare professionals. The popularity of CAM has brought into sharp focus clinical issues such as the lack of disclosure and concern about interactions among dietary supplements, prescribed medications, and diseases. Those clinical issues underscore the need for a coordinated approach to integrate CAM therapies safely into conventional medicine. This article describes how an integrative CAM program in an outpatient oncology center addresses some of the clinical issues. The CAM program uses a nurse specialist to interface between CAM and conventional medicine. An interesting aspect of the CAM program is the provision of patient consultation and the creation of an individualized complementary therapies plan.

Use of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) among the general population, and patients diagnosed with cancer in particular, has increased steadily since the 1980s. Many of the therapies are used in conjunction with conventional medicine; consequently, several challenging clinical issues have surfaced that must be addressed. The issues include the lack of disclosure of CAM use by patients to their providers (Eisenberg et al., 1998; Yates et al., 2005), concerns about safety and efficacy surrounding CAM therapies (Henderson & Donatelle, 2004), and lack of knowledge about CAM on the part of patients and healthcare providers (HCPs) (Kreitzer, Mitten, Harris, & Shandeling, 2002; Rosenbaum, Nisly, Ferguson, & Kligman, 2002).

In response to these challenges, an outpatient oncology center created an institutional committee of physicians, nurses, and other providers to investigate how best to meet the demands for CAM and to address these clinical issues. The outcome was the development of a CAM program that gained the full support of administrators, physicians, nurses, and social workers. The goal of the CAM program is to integrate complementary therapies into conventional medicine practice. In a newly developed role, a nurse specialist (NS) who is knowledgeable in CAM and conventional medicine was assigned to further develop and manage the CAM program. The ability of the NS to navigate between CAM and conventional medicine facilitates integration and bridges the gap between patients, other providers, and CAM practitioners. A special feature of the CAM program is the provi-

At a Glance

- ◆ A complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) program is created to address challenging clinical issues that result from the steady increase in CAM use.
- ◆ The goal of a CAM program is to integrate CAM therapies into conventional medicine, thus addressing some of the clinical issues such as communication gaps among CAM users, healthcare providers, and CAM practitioners.
- ◆ A special feature of the CAM program is the provision of an individualized patient consultation by a nurse specialist. The end result of the consultation is a complementary therapies plan, based on established standards of practice, for the patient to use.

sion of an individualized patient consultation by the NS. This approach is unique because the consultation provides a forum for patient education about CAM, the beginning of an invaluable therapeutic relationship, and the creation of an individualized complementary therapies plan (CTP).

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