



Complementary and alternative medicine in german medical schools

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Complementary and alternative medicine in German medical schools

Dear Sir

The utilization of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) is growing in Western societies (Eisenberg *et al.*, 1998; Vickers & Zollman, 1999). This trend has fostered the gradual integration of CAM courses into medical school curricula (Wetzel *et al.*, 1998; Frenkel & Ben Arye, 2002; Wetzel *et al.*, 2002). Additionally, medical students are interested in CAM and would like further information about it within their curriculum (Owen & Lewith, 2001; Frenkel & Ben Arye, 2002). The aims of this survey were to assess the opinions of key decision makers at German medical schools regarding CAM and to document the current state of integrating CAM in the medical school system.

In September 1997, a total of 753 questionnaires were sent to the directors of all clinical departments and institutes at university medical schools. After two months, a reminder was sent to those who had not yet responded. The questionnaire included the following parameters: Participants were asked to provide information about themselves and their job character as well as their opinions of CAM. In addition, information as to the current state of CAM at German medical schools was requested.

A total of 467 questionnaires (62%) were returned. Respondents were 48 ± 10 years of age, and 85% were male. In total, 37% of respondents had a positive personal opinion of the role of CAM treatment, 27% had a neutral and 30% had a negative opinion. CAM therapies viewed most positively were osteopathy (52%), acupuncture (48%), and naturopathy (41%). Chinese medicine (17%) and homeopathy (10%) were viewed least positively. Most respondents were in favor of integrating CAM into the medical system, although more approved of its integration into research and development (84%) and teaching (80%) than its use in patient treatment (61%). Nevertheless, only 185 respondents (40%) indicated that CAM treatment methods had been integrated to any significant extent in their respective medical schools. In these schools, the main

focus in CAM was on education (28%), followed by research (23%) and patient treatment (22%).

Our survey demonstrates that the majority of respondents were in favor of integrating CAM into medical school curricula. However, only a few medical schools had actually put this into practice. The reasons for this contradiction are unclear and should be investigated to eventually achieve cooperation between conventional medicine and CAM.

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