

# Ethics and Safety in Alternative Medicine Practice

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## Abstract

Alternative medicine seeks to expand medical ideas, meet gaps in knowledge, or advance a common goal. Therapies including massage, biofeedback, or meditating, and visual imagery are demonstrations of how alternative medicine can enhance a person's overall wellbeing. The principle of ethics includes autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence and justice. Complementary and alternative medicine's public medical ethics, which emphasize fair treatment, respect for human autonomy, and harm prevention, comply with difficulties in the context of global health ethics. People seek information on alternative medicine's safety, efficacy, and provider suitability, influencing their decisions to use or not use a therapy. Alternative practices include informed consent that is a crucial aspect of medical practice, facilitating shared-decision-based healthcare and upholding ethical and legal standards. It involves a conversation or negotiation process, requiring patients to have adequate details to make informed choices. Integrity involves disclosing information about therapies' efficacy and risks, promoting wellbeing, avoiding damage, respecting self-determination, and treating everyone fairly. Regulation of medicines in healthcare has strengthened public safety, state recognition, rights protection, reimbursement policies, and equal employment opportunities, promoting their role in healthcare. Patient education resources improve health literacy by educating patients about their problems and promoting optimal well-being.

**Keywords:** Alternative medicine, Ethics principles, Integrity, Regulation, Decision making.

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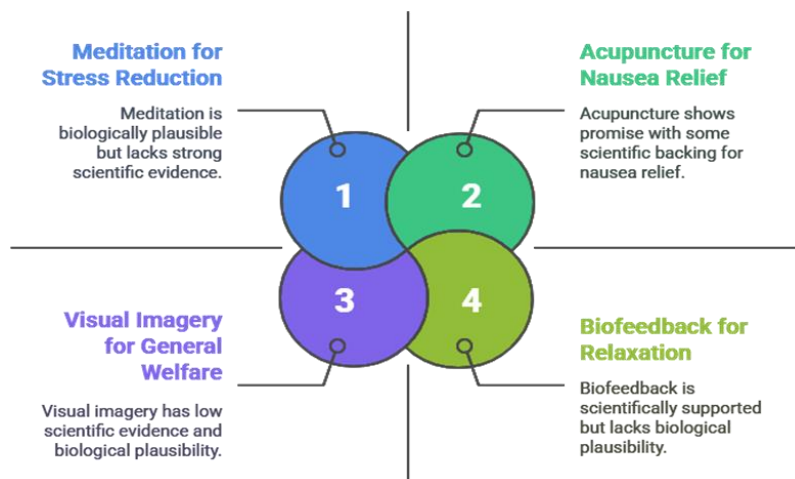
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## Introduction

Alternative medicine is an approach that seeks to provide the advantages of traditional medicine without having sufficient scientific evidence or biological plausibility. Alternative medicine is described as diagnosis, treatment, and prevention that enhances mainstream medicine by addressing a need not addressed by orthodoxy, broadening the medical conceptual framework, or contributing to a shared whole (Morrissey et al., 2022). Alternative medicine may be able to change some symptoms, which could be crucial in diagnosing some serious illnesses. Any therapeutic approach "that does not fall within the discipline of conventional medicine" is considered alternative medicine. In certain nations, the terms "alternative medicine" and "complementary medicine" are interchangeable with traditional medicine (Monika et al., 2022).



**Fig. 1:** Alternative Medicine Classification

Since alternative medicine emphasizes curing the mind, body, and spirit, it can improve a person's general welfare (Figure 1). Stress reduction and relaxation are facilitated by therapies like massage, biofeedback, meditation, and visual imagery (Maduskar, 2021). Acupuncture and other therapies may help alleviate nausea induced by chemotherapy medications. Clinical trials have not yet sufficiently validated the claims that some alternative medicines can strengthen the immune system and aid in the fight against specific cancers (Melvin et al., 2021).

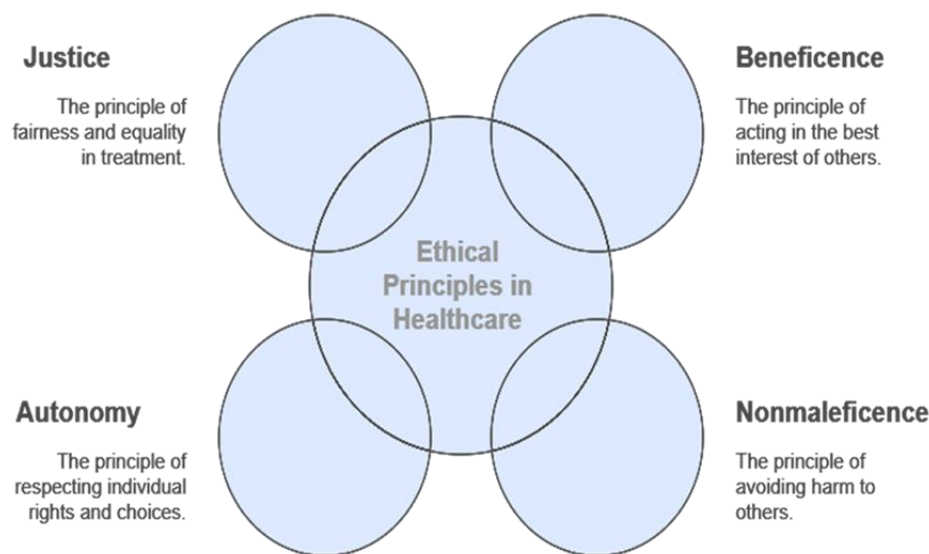
Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) is defined as "a collection of medical and health care systems, practices, and various products not currently considered part of conventional medicine". It includes the use of pharmacologically active agents (homeopathy, vitamins, minerals, herbs), particular diets, physical techniques (acupuncture/acupressure, yoga, osteopathy as well, special exercises, massage, chiropractic), and psychological techniques (mindfulness, relaxation, hypnosis) (Medioni et al., 2023). In order to activate the body's natural defenses, homeopathy is a therapeutic approach that uses minute but physiologically active dosages of chemically neutral or even toxic substances obtained from plant, animal, and mineral sources. Accordingly, homeopathy is defined in scientific literature as an alternative medicine approach that uses remedies made from substantially diluted vegetable, or inorganic substances to treat a wide range of illnesses (Maftai et al., 2024). Herbal remedies are a key component of treatment in alternative medical systems like naturopathy and Ayurveda. Any portion of the plants, herbs, herbal medicine or combinations, extracts of herbs, and purified herbal goods that contain a phytochemical as an active ingredient are considered herbal medicines (Teixeira et al., 2024).

People look for information on the safety and efficacy of alternative medicine in relation to their sickness or overall health, as well as the suitability and reliability of alternative medicine providers and how they treat patients and healthcare. Therefore, citizens' decisions to utilize or not use a specific therapy, CAM provider, or medication may be greatly influenced by the information they acquired and the sources from which they obtain it (Dzeng et al., 2022). Numerous conundrums and conflicts pertaining to public medical ethics of complementary and alternative medicine are highlighted under the global health ethics context, which is defined by addresses with equitable and equal treatment in health, the necessity of respecting human autonomy, and a responsibility to prevent harm (Oreagba & Oshikoya, 2023).

### Ethical Principles in Healthcare

The four principles of ethics are autonomy, justice, nonmaleficence, and beneficence. Informed consent including ability to refuse, which take into account a person's circumstances, limitations, and abilities, are two ways that medical ethics exhibit autonomy for patients in decision-making. People who lack the ability (competence) to act independently are not covered by the autonomy concept, examples include children and newborns who are incompetent owing to developmental, mental, or physical disorders. As seen in many healthcare systems around the world, including the United Kingdom (UK) National Health Service as well as the Australian public health care system, the introduction of patient "rights" to learn more and make decisions, such as alternate types of services, further reinforces the significance of patient autonomy (Liang et al., 2022).

One of the main tenets of bioethics is "beneficence," which can serve to safeguard the patient's significant and justifiable interests (Avant & Swetz, 2020). The ethical commitment to benefit, which includes defending patients' rights, keeping them safe, and assisting those in danger, is emphasized by the concept of beneficence. According to a different perspective, beneficence is understood to mean protecting patients and guaranteeing the delivery of care that has beneficial effects, which is crucial for any medical care (Cheraghi et al., 2023). The duty of a doctor to refrain from doing damage to their patients is known as nonmaleficence. This straightforward idea upholds a number of moral precepts, including that do not murder, inflict suffering or pain, render someone helpless, inflict offence, or deny them access to the necessities of life. The doctor must determine the optimal course of treatment for the patient by weighing the advantages and disadvantages of all therapies and procedures, avoiding those that would place an undue load on them, and applying nonmaleficence in practice (Varkey, 2021).



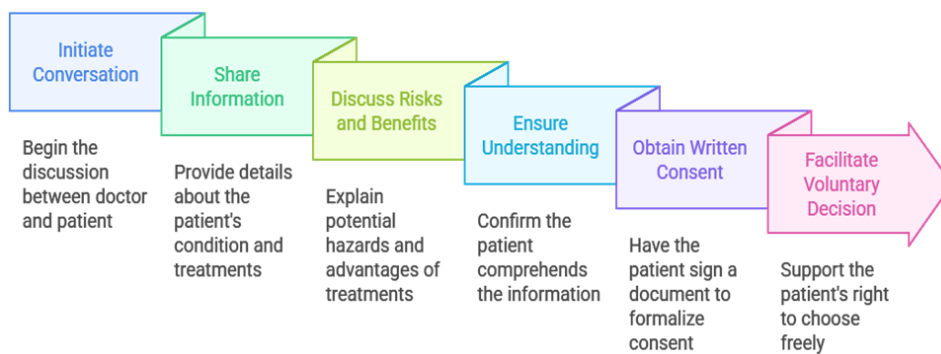
**Fig. 2:** Principles of Ethics in Healthcare

In general, justice is understood as treating people fairly, equally, and appropriately. Distributive justice is the category of justice that is most relevant to clinical ethics out of all of the others (Figure 2). The justifiable standards that govern the conditions of social cooperation define a fair, equitable, and suitable allocation of health care resources. This is known as distributive justice (Knoll, 2022). In addition to

highlighting ethical issues with natural healthcare, the application of a straightforward ethical framework like the four values can also offer solutions for raising standards of ethics in the practice, production, and teaching of alternative medicine. We have offered ideas on how the principles might be realized in each of these endeavors, but more research funding is also essential to improving the ethical standards in alternative medicine. Although there are procedures that can be done to guarantee that patients receive respectful and considerate treatment and are educated about the possible risks associated with herbal medicine, the availability of this information is restricted (Gatt et al., 2024).

### Informed Consent in Alternative Practice

A crucial and essential part of medical practice is informed consent (IC). Informed consent should be a conversation or negotiation process meant to result in an agreement (Figure 3). The American Medical Association's (AMA) states that "the patient's ability to make self-decision can be effectively implemented only if the patient possess adequate details to enable an informed choice" is the fundamental component of informed consent. It establishes a shared-decision-based healthcare approach and facilitates information and knowledge sharing between the patient and the doctor. The informed consent procedure is essential for upholding ethical and legal standards in medical intervention. However, getting patients' fully informed permission is difficult since it necessitates human contacts and discussion of a number of topics, including the patient's condition and available treatments, comprising hazards and benefits, complications, and uncertainties. In order to facilitate patients' voluntary decision to take part in a clinical trial, IC has to include a document that patients must read and sign and spoken communication to assure proper understanding (Page et al., 2021). The participants' understanding of blinding (apart from the investigators' blinding), voluntary involvement, and the right to leave at any moment was the highest (above 50%).



**Fig. 3:** Informed Consent Process in Medical Practice

### Professional Conduct and Integrity

Health care professionals typically work within a framework that is dictated by ethical principles, which include autonomy, fairness, beneficence, and nonmaleficence. Integrity necessitates that medicinal professionals freely disclose the information that is now available regarding the efficacy and the hazards of their therapies. Together, these guidelines require that health care providers work to advance wellbeing, avoid damage, respect people's right to self-determination, and guarantee that everyone is treated fairly. Integrity is the ability to uphold moral principles while integrating thoughts, information, and goals in a logical manner (Childress, 2022). The legal view in the majority of nations is that professionals shouldn't try to preserve life at all costs and that patient cannot seek therapy that may not be in their greatest interest. But in the event of uncertainty, the choice must be made with life preservation in mind. When deciding whether to withhold or withdraw treatment, all medical professionals should be able to articulate an ethical process that considers the law, governmental directives, the body of evidence, and the resources at their disposal. Along with their clinical state, doctors need to know their patients' abilities, beliefs, and preferences (Alford et al., 2024). In all civilizations and nations, the value of "honesty" is a fundamental tenet of moral human interaction. However, the concept of honesty takes on a wider and more significant role within the healthcare industry. Justice in distribution promotes equal access to healthcare by guaranteeing that treatments are broadly available. Corrective fairness, on the other hand, emphasizes accountability and responsibility in the healthcare process by compensating for incorrect medical decisions. Respect involves recognizing that people may have different tastes, customs, and cultural backgrounds than one's own. In the framework of medicine, it means that a medical professional accepts and endorses a treatment plan or choice, even if it conflicts with their own preferences (Mehraban et al., 2024).

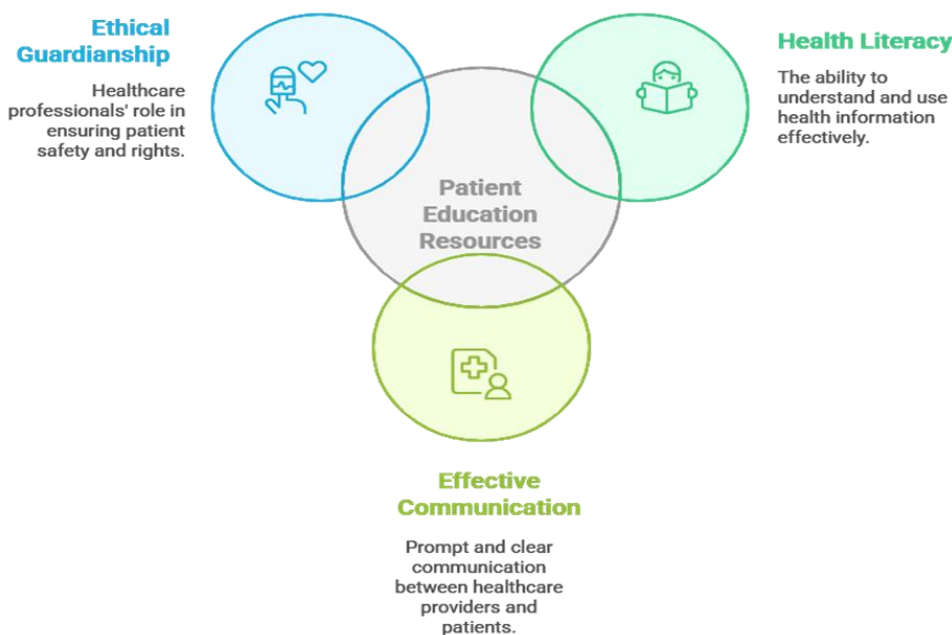
### Regulation and Licensing

Public safety, state recognition, rights protection, public access to reimbursement policies for naturopathic care costs, and resolving issues related to equal employment opportunities in national health systems were all thought to be benefits of regulation. Recognition of medicines role in healthcare has been strengthened by national regulations governing the evaluation of their quality, safety, and effectiveness as well as the efforts of the world health organization (WHO) and European Union (EU) to encourage the creation of standard guidelines in this area (Liang et al., 2021). Four different alternative medicine professions are used in Ontario's alternative medicine profession regulation: homeopaths, naturopaths, chiropractors, and practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). The possibility to compare those controlled previously with the ones regulated more recently led to the precise selection of these four. Two were regulated in accordance with the Drugless Professionals Act (DPA) almost a century ago (naturopathy and chiropractor in 1925), while two were regulated by the Regulation of Health Professions Act (RHPA) less than seven years ago (homeopathy in 2015 and TCM practitioners in 2013). It is important to remember that homeopathy was first controlled in 1869 and then deregulated in 1970 after being excluded via the Ontario Medical Act. Additionally, although they are currently governed by the RHPA, chiropractors and naturopaths are still subject to regulations (Ng, 2020). National legislation, a

national professional association, the requirement to complete further education, or no regulation at all govern alternative medicine practices in several countries. In general, alternative medicine is either included in the public healthcare system or is not controlled. Each Member State of the European Union (EU) is still in charge of its own health policy. National laws pertaining to alternative medicine are influenced by EU directives and regulations (Pokladnikova & Telec, 2020).

### Patient Education and Advocacy

Patient education resources enhance patients' health literacy by educating them about their problems. Health literacy is defined as "personal understanding and abilities that allow people to access, comprehend, evaluate, and use knowledge and resources in ways which encourage and safeguard optimal well-being and health of their own and those around them" (Nutbeam & Muscat, 2021). When it is appropriate, medical personnel especially practitioners should give all the details on their patients' conditions (Figure 4). It is their responsibility to give patients and, if required, the patients' decision-makers comprehensive knowledge about modern medical techniques that can be employed in end-of-life care (Hasan et al., 2021). Ensuring fair and suitable care for people near the end of their lives is a moral duty for healthcare professionals. Good education and awareness of better treatment effects can help achieve this (Rodriguez-Prat et al., 2021). Patients as well as their families benefited greatly from prompt, effective, and efficient patient education in terms of medical treatment and collaborative decision-making based on patient preferences and the most recent and updated clinical data (Bhattad & Pacifico, 2022). As ethical guardians in the ever-changing healthcare industry, healthcare professionals are essential in the patient safety, provide advocacy, and transparency. Their responsibilities include advocating for patients' rights and upholding moral standards (Ibrahim, 2024).



**Fig. 4:** Foundation of Patient Education

### Ethical Challenges

Since prehistoric times, the medical area of science has made global advances. The average life duration and quality of life improve when the death rate decreases (Jansen et al., 2021). This can be attributed to the discovery of new medications, enhanced formulation adjustments, the establishment of novel treatments and drug-delivery systems, and the refinement of previously approved therapeutic techniques (Mao et al., 2022). However, when it comes to achieving the highest level of perfection in public health, it is unavoidable that there are many flaws in present therapies, and many cures or vaccines for major diseases like as AIDS have yet to be discovered or produced (Briggs et al., 2020). Therapeutic medications for several pandemics, including COVID-19, and newly identified illnesses have yet to be developed, and disease management remains limited to symptomatic therapy (Mirzaeian et al., 2019).

Another aspect is the high expense of medical treatment, which makes it nearly difficult for current healthcare systems to protect public health (Saggar et al, 2022). Despite years of hard work by healthcare organizations, medical scientists, and clinical investigators, and clinical sciences still have a long way to go not only in terms of achieving health equity and developing cost-effective treatment strategies, but also in dealing with constantly changing viruses and prevalent disorders (Zhou et al., 2019). To effectively integrate plant medicine into sophisticated medicinal practices, substantial trials in both pre-clinical studies and clinical settings are required. The trials are critical for the proper implementation of not only Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP), but also for Good Agricultural and Collection Practices (GACP), as well as FDA approval of herbal medication (Zhang et al., 2021).

### Integrative Medicine

Integrative medicine offers a broader perspective on medicine than the mainstream biological model. It stems from an increasing realization that, while high-tech medicine has been enormously effective in some areas, it cannot solve the increasing epidemic of chronic illnesses that are destroying the US national economy, and that prevention and promotion of health are critical to establishing a healthier

society. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, chronic diseases account for 70% of all deaths (Maizes et al., 2009). Approximately 40% of cancer patients use integrative therapies on a yearly basis (Mao et al., 2022). The fundamental governing principle of integrative medicine is to employ these interventions alongside conventional pain management approaches (e.g., drugs, physical therapies and radiation), rather than to replace conventional interventions (Witt et al., 2017).

It is impossible to deny that fulfilling research protocols and standard trial requirements is required for developing the safety and efficacy profile of herbal medicines, which is much more difficult than Western medicine due to extrinsic factors beyond human control such as environmental fluctuations (Zhang et al., 2021). Since the widespread usage of herbal goods in industrialized nations, various questions concerning the confusing information regarding the safety, efficacy, and compatibility of herbal medications with food or other conventional or herbal items have arisen again (Fitzgerald et al., 2020). Furthermore, the widespread reliance of most people living in countries that are developing having struggling or typical economies on crude plants, their extracts, or natural remedies has raised serious concerns about the safety profile of these products, the development of standard herbal drugs in accordance with international standards, and their adequate incorporation into conventional medical care (Raclariu-Manolică et al., 2023).

### Conclusion and Future Directions

Due to increasing awareness, scientific scrutiny, and accountability, alternative medicine's ethical standards are evolving. For the safety of patients, prevent deception, and protect ethical integrity in conventional medicine, these principles place a high priority on patient-centered treatment, clinical evidence, professional regulation, and informed consent. The viability of alternative medicine depends on the education and self-regulation of its practitioners. Even though the majority of people are familiar of alternative therapies, many are reluctant to combine them with traditional conventional therapy to maximize their own therapeutic advantages. This must be altered by intensive education initiatives aimed at advancing alternative medicine in society. Maintaining current knowledge of safety procedures, ethical frameworks, and scientific advancements improves clinical competency and continued education not only increase Clinical effectiveness, also closes the knowledge gap between conventional and modern medicine. Technological developments should facilitate improved monitoring of challenges and treatment outcomes. Collectively, these advancements aim to recognize the various traditions that support alternative medicine while maintaining autonomy for patients, safety, and competence.

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