ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES:

ROLE OF NURSE IN IMPLEMENTING AND EVALUATING THE OUTCOMES OF ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES

"There is a natural healing force within us,

and it is the greatest force in getting well."

 -Hippocrates

The history of alternative therapy dates back thousands of years to ancient civilizations such as India, China, and Greece. In India, Ayurveda and Yoga have been the primary forms of alternative therapy for centuries. People all around the world have shown keen interest in alternative therapies, searching for natural and holistic solutions to their health problems.1

Alternative therapy, also known as complementary medicine, is an umbrella term used to describe a range of healing practices and modalities that are not a part of conventional Western medicine. 1

In India, alternative medicine consists of (AYUSH) Ayurveda, yoga, naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and homeopathy, and its objective is to introduce and promote strategies for mainstreaming the indigenous systems of medicine. 2

There are registered health facilities in India that dispense CAM (complementary and alternative medicine) drugs.3

Various studies show that the prevalence rate of CAM use in the general population ranges from 30% to 40%, the number increases significantly high for the tribal and ethnic minority population, where it is seen that more than 7 out of every 10 individuals use CAM in their lifetime. 4

The use of CAM is also quite high in low- and middle-income countries in Asia. 4

Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) is a group of diverse medical and healthcare systems, practices, and products that are not presently considered to be part of conventional medicine (National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine [NCCAM], 2004. 5

CAM is also called mind-body medicine because it is an approach to healing that uses the power of thought and emotions to positively influence physical health (USA Drug, 2005). 5

Complementary therapies are interventions used with conventional therapies. Alternative therapies are interventions used instead of conventional medicine to treat or ameliorate disease. Both focus on the body, mind, and spirit. 5

NCCAM (2004) delineates five categories of CAM:

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| **TYPE** | **DESCRIPTION** | **EXAMPLES** |
| **Alternative Medical Systems** | Complete medical systems of theory and practice. | Ayurveda, homeopathy, indigenous healing practices, naturopathy, osteopathy, and traditional Chinese medicine. |
| **Mind-Body Interventions** | Enhance the mind’s capacity to affect bodily functions. | Art therapy, behavioral medicine, biofeedback, dance, dream therapy, humor, hypnotherapy, imagery, intuition, meditation, prayer, music/sound therapy, support groups and yoga. |
| **Biologically Based Therapies** | Use of substances found in nature. | Herbs, aromatherapy, diet, flower essence, nutritional supplements, vitamins, and pharmacological/biological treatments. |
| **Manipulative and Body-Based Methods** | Manipulation and/or movement of one or more parts of the body. | Acupressure, Alexander technique, chiropractic, craniosacral, Feldenkrasis, massage, osteopathy, reflexology, rolfing, and Trager method. |
| **Energy Therapies** | Use of electromagnetic fields or energy fields around the body. | Qigong, prayer, reiki, therapeutic touch, full spectrum light, crystals, electromagnetic field, and transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation. |

Alternative therapies practiced worldwide,

1. Acupressure: It is a practice where the practitioners use their hands, elbows, or feet to apply pressure to specific points along the body's "Meridians." Meridians are channels that carry life energy throughout the body. The reasoning holds that illness can occur when one of these meridians is blocked or out of balance. Acupressure is thought to relieve blockages so energy can flow freely again, restoring wellness. In 2013, researchers worked with a group of adolescents suffering from insomnia. They found that acupressure helped them fall asleep faster and get deeper sleep. It also helps in relieving pain, headaches, and labor pain. 6

2. Acupuncture: The therapy consists of penetrating the skin with thin needles controlled by a practitioner. Positive results are seen in patients with PMS, insomnia, and many types of chronic pain. 6

3. Aromatherapy: It includes the use of essential oils and highly concentrated extracts from the roots, leaves, seeds, or blossoms of plants to promote healing. The oils can be inhaled using a diffuser, or diluted in a carrier oil and massaged into the skin. It is used to treat inflammation or infections while others are used to promote relaxation and calm. 6

In clinical settings, researchers have focused on aromatherapy for anxiety, depression, pain relief, nausea, and insomnia. In one of the studies aromatherapy with lavender was found to promote sleep and reduce anxiety for patients with heart disease. In a study done on female nurses working night shifts, it was seen that massage with sweet marjoram essential oil, and drinking a glass of warm water, there was an improvement in the quality of sleep. 6

4. Ayurveda medicine: It has been originated in India and been practiced for thousands of years. It includes the use of a variety of techniques, including herbs, massage, and specialized diets, with the intent of balancing the body, mind, and spirit to promote overall wellness. Several studies show positive results for specific Ayurvedic practices, like taking turmeric for inflammation, using a Neti pot to clear the sinuses (called nasal irrigation), or swishing coconut oil in your mouth to pull out bacteria (known as oil pulling). Yoga has been shown time and time again to address a range of mental and physical health issues, like anxiety, depression, high blood pressure, and insomnia, among others. 6

5. Balneotherapy: This therapy started around 1700 BCE and includes the use of water for treating a range of conditions from acne to pain, swelling to anxiety. It includes the use of mudpacks, douches, and long soaks. This therapy is also called "spa therapy." In one of the studies, it was found that spa therapy combined with exercise could ease low back pain. 4

6. Biofeedback: These techniques allow people to control bodily processes that normally happen involuntarily such as heart rate, blood pressure, muscle tension, and skin temperature to improve conditions including high blood pressure, headaches, and chronic pain. Patients work with a biofeedback therapist to learn these relaxation techniques and mental exercises. In initial sessions, electrodes are attached to the skin to measure bodily states, but eventually, the techniques can be practiced without a therapist or equipment. During biofeedback, you become more self-aware of how you react physically to stress, exercise, or emotions. In turn, you can learn to reduce negative effects on your body and health. In 2017, researchers gathered 451 records on biofeedback and sports performance, and it was found that 85 percent of athletes improved their performance by messing with their heart rate using biofeedback. 6

7. Chiropractic medicine: The practice focuses on the musculoskeletal and nervous systems, treating issues in the back, neck, joints, arms, legs, and head. It includes spinal manipulation, which involves applying controlled force (typically the chiropractor's hands) to joints that have become hypo-mobile. It helps to restore mobility and loosen the muscles, allowing tissues to heal and relieve pain. 6

8. Homeopathy: It's based on the principle of treating "like with like," meaning a substance that causes adverse reactions when taken in large doses can be used in small amounts to treat those same symptoms. 6

Homeopaths gather extensive background information on patients before prescribing a highly diluted substance, usually in liquid or tablet form, to jumpstart the body's natural systems of healing. These treatments are called "remedies." 6

9. Reflexology: It involves applying pressure to specific areas on the feet, hands, or ears. The points correspond to different body organs and systems. Pressing them is believed to positively affect these organs and a person's overall health. For example, applying pressure to a spot on the arch of the foot is believed to benefit bladder function. People around the world use this therapy to complement conventional treatments for conditions including anxiety, cancer, diabetes, kidney function, and asthma. It helps to reduce depression and hospital anxiety in patients with cardiovascular disease, chemotherapy-induced nausea, and fatigue, and also in reducing stress. 6

10. Reiki: It is a form of energy healing based on the idea that a "life force" energy flows through everyone's body. According to this philosophy, sickness, and stress are indications that life force energy is low, while energy, health, and happiness signify a strong life force. In a Reiki session, a practitioner seeks to transfer life energy to the client by placing their hands lightly on the client's body or a slight distance away from the body. It can also be performed long-distance. It also promotes relaxation, speed healing, reduce pain, and generally improve the client's well-being. 6

The literature suggests that one of the forces driving the use of CAM therapies is the belief

that the intervention works and can make a difference (Berman & Straus,2004)7

Individuals with chronic illness use CAM therapy as a result of taking personal responsibility for their health, re-evaluating therapeutic options, and adopting a practical lifestyle (Thorne, Paterson, Russell, & Schultz, 2002). 7

CAM therapies focus on the concept of energy. The body is viewed as an energy system that has meridians or energy transport systems as well as chakras or energy centers (Eden, 1998). CAM practitioners believe that the human body is a latticework of energy fields and that, if one wants to age well, one must "energy" well. Acupuncture, acupressure, reflexology, Reiki, and therapeutic touch are based on the concept of the body as an energy system. Therefore, when the body is not healthy, there are corresponding disturbances in its energy system that should be identified and treated. Flow and balance can be noninvasively restored in an energy system by the use of massage, tapping, exercises, and postures such as those used in yoga. 6

CAM therapies are non-invasive, often cost less than traditional interventions, and utilize the innate healing abilities of healthcare practitioners.

The purpose of CAM therapies is to heal. Nurses are natural healers; in partnership with patients, they restore balance and integrity to patients' minds and bodies. Consequently, both the quality and quantity of patients' years of life can be increased, as suggested by Healthy People 2010 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000). 7

Nurses have a unique opportunity to provide services that facilitate wholeness. They need to understand all aspects of CAM, including costs, patient knowledge, and drug interactions if they are to promote holistic strategies for patients seeking to achieve a higher quality of life. 5

Nurses need to understand certain issues surrounding CAM use:

1) The use of CAM therapies may be limited by insurance companies and viewed cautiously by both healthcare providers and patients because of limited evidence and the non-traditional characteristics of CAM. 7

2) Researchers find that patients often do not consult their physicians or healthcare providers before starting CAM. The reasons for this are unclear (Brunelli & Gorson, 2004). Keeping patient safety in mind, it is imperative that nurses explore CAM use with patients, with an emphasis on potential harmful interactions between present and recommended conventional treatments and CAM therapies (Miller et al., 2004; Tindle et al., 2005). These discussions, including the specific therapies and associated patient education, must be documented in the patient's record. 7

3) Nurses, as natural healers, need knowledge of CAM therapies, their interactions with conventional treatments, and related research to safely facilitate patients" exploration and utilization of CAM. 7.

4) Nurses need to assess patients' beliefs, knowledge, and current use of CAM before developing a plan of care that includes CAM utilization. 7

5) The nurse should suggest that the patient gather as much information about the therapy as possible. Patients need to be encouraged to become educated consumers of products and services. It is recommended that a significant other accompany patients to appointments involving CAM for support and understanding of therapies (American Cancer Society, 2004). Remind patients that they should not delay conventional treatments that are the standard of care as they seek complementary therapies. 7

6) Nurses interested in a holistic approach to health care should explore the availability of CAM services in their facilities. Nurses can assist in the development of policies and procedures for the use of CAM services, especially dietary supplements. Only half of the nursing schools surveyed in 2003 (N = 148) included CAM in their course of study (Dutta et al., 2003). Nurses have the opportunity to work with nursing schools to expand their curricula to address CAM therapies. 7

Role of Nurse in Implementing and Evaluating the Alternative Therapies:

 1) Provide full disclosure of the therapy, including discussing the pros and cons of all therapeutic options available to the patient.

2) Be cognizant of the ethical and cultural issues and considerations surrounding alternative therapy to fully function as an advocate for quality, comprehensive care of patients.

3) Discuss with the patient, and family when appropriate, available options regarding alternative therapy and support the patient's choice.

4) Continually seek avenues to raise community awareness about the benefits of alternative therapy in wellness and preventative medicine.

5) Conduct, support, and/or participate in research to study the effectiveness of alternative therapy as a nursing intervention.

6) Encourage professional nursing organizations to work collaboratively

7) Advocate that health care practitioners and health care facilities provide the patient with the opportunity to obtain conventional and alternative therapy by accepting and integrating the availability of such therapies into the health care delivery system.

8) Advocate that nursing programs integrate alternative therapy concepts and information into their existing curricula. 7

9) To help ensure successful wide-scale implementation of any therapy start with a small pilot project and disseminate the results 8

10) Delineate the scope and objective of the project, take stakeholder support, and determine budgets and resources. 8

11) Perform a complete review of any harms or risks associated with specific therapies. Try to select organic products from a reputable source and also try to verify the purity of their products. 8

12) Establish program policies and procedures, develop patient education and assessment policies (including assessing patients for allergies), establish standardized electronic health record documentation processes, and measure patient outcomes. 8

13) Evaluate the effectiveness and safety of the program. Is the patient's nausea, pain, anxiety, and sleep improved? Is the intervention cost-effective? Is the patient expressing greater satisfaction with the care received? Does the cost of providing the therapy benefit the patient by enhancing wellness and satisfaction? 8

Thus to conclude, the nursing profession has a long history of caring for individuals in a holistic manner. Florence Nightingale recognized the importance of caring for the whole person and encouraged interventions that enhanced individuals' abilities to draw upon their healing powers. She considered touch, light, aromatics, empathetic listening, music, quiet reflection, and similar healing measures as essential ingredients to good nursing care.7

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