Complementary and Alternative Medicines

Complementary and alternative medicine was among the issues raised by many participants during the Conversation on Health. Health professionals, education and awareness, complementary and alternative practitioners, administration and Medical Services Plan coverage were highlighted in many discussions and submissions. Here is a selection of what British Columbians had to say on the subject of complementary and alternative medicine.

Health Professionals

In general, participants feel that health professionals do not accept alternative medicine or support patients’ right to chose. They believe that doctors do not have adequate knowledge and training of alternative therapies or enough incentive to recommend them. They also think that doctors have a duty to increase their own understanding of these therapies. Without it, they argue, patients will not receive the collaborative expertise of all health professionals providing the best possible care.

Suggestions focus on cooperation between doctors and alternative practitioners as the key to receiving high quality treatment. Doctors should have to learn about alternative therapies and different cultures and practices, including First Nations traditional healing, and blend this knowledge into their own practices. Participants feel that this will lead to medical care that puts the best interests of the patient first.

*Blend traditional First Nations medicines with conventional western medicine. Educate health professionals about different cultures and practices.*

– Health Professionals’ Forum, Prince George

Education and Awareness

Submissions identify poor education about complementary and alternative medicine as a factor in its limited use by the medical community and the public. Though some indicate that awareness has increased over the past few decades, many argue that a lack of information about alternative therapies has led to the unnecessary progression of treatable chronic conditions. Others also note that alternative medicine may completely prevent certain illnesses and reduce the need for expensive curative treatment.
Many participants suggest that alternative practitioners could inform the public about lifestyle patterns such as eating and sleeping habits, which may enable individuals to notice and correct signs of ill-health on their own. Increased awareness may also allow chronic disease sufferers to better manage their symptoms and avoid the need for acute health care. Participants think that more education would lead to greater patient empowerment.

Complementary and Alternative Practitioners

Participants’ opinions about complementary and alternative practitioners were split. Some think that these practitioners are not as well-trained and cannot offer the same level of care as Medical Doctors; others were impressed by their skill. Many voiced concern that alternative practitioners, particularly Naturopathic Doctors, lacked the ability to access laboratory results, refer patients to specialists and visit patients in hospital. Quality of treatment causes disagreement as well: though some patients receive excellent care, others saw no benefit from the treatment they receive from alternative practitioners.

Administration

Accreditation of alternative disciplines is a source of varied opinion in the Conversation on Health. Some argue that practitioners such as naturopaths based their therapies on sound scientific practices. Others disagree and counter that the health care system needs an accreditation and regulatory approval body that would identify the appropriate scope of practice for groups of practitioners based on evidence. Still others take the middle road, willing to see alternative therapies funded if further research proved their benefit.

I think great care should be exercised in incorporating alternative medicine in to the publicly funded system. It should be defined just what procedures will be used, and are they researched and regulated by a Board of Oversight. The costs should be closely audited and regulated.

– Web Dialogue, Surrey
Medical Services Plan Coverage

Much of the comment about coverage for complementary and alternative therapies under the Medical Services Plan focuses on the effect of cost to individuals. Some feel that the lack of coverage is a barrier for the public, particularly low-income families, to accessing treatment from alternative practitioners. Having to pay out-of-pocket for these treatments leads others to feel financially over-burdened: they pay both to support the health care system and to choose alternative health care.

*Alternative medicine should be integrated and encouraged as part of the health care package. Currently, it is too expensive for many of those with chronic diseases.*
– Regional Public Forum, Castlegar

There is no clear-cut agreement about whether or not complementary and alternative therapies should be covered. While some think patients choosing these therapies should pay their own way, others say the treatments should be covered, describing them as effective alternatives to costly and more conventional care. They cite increased affordability of and accessibility to services as the main benefits to coverage under the Medical Services Plan.

Conclusion

The discussion about complementary and alternative medicine centres on choice in the system and collaboration between all health professionals. Though participants cannot agree on whether complementary or alternative treatments should be covered by the public health care system, the majority believes that more treatment choice would benefit many British Columbians, and particularly those suffering from chronic illness. Many participants advocate a cooperative treatment atmosphere, involving many health practitioners in treatment rather than one point-of-entry to the medical system. They argue that this approach will provide higher quality, more holistic care for patients in the province.

*Sure, complementary and alternative medicines, just to let people have options. Even at these centres if people want to find out what options do exist for them, they can ask, you know, this is my problem; is my only option to just go to the medical doctor, or can I see a physiotherapist without a referral? Or can I see a naturopathic doctor without a referral? What kind of services exist in this community?*
– Focus Workshop on Complementary and Alternative Medicine, Vancouver
Complementary and Alternative Medicines

This chapter includes the following topics:

- Health Professionals
- Socio-Economic Issues
- Chronic Disease Management
- Education and Awareness
- Complementary and Alternative Practitioners
- Administration
- Medical Services Plan Coverage
- Alternative Care Providers Role in the Team-Based Model

Related Electronic Written Submissions

- Presentation to Conversation on Health
  Massage Therapists Association of BC
- Submission to the Conversation on Health
  Health Action Network Society (HANS)
- BC Conversation on Health A Partnership...for Health Care or Wealth Care
  British Columbia Chiropractic Association
- Brief for The BC Government's Conversation on Health
  College of Massage Therapists of BC
- Report to the Conversation on Health
  BC Cancer Agency
- Submission to the Conversation on Health
  Life Sciences British Columbia

Related Chapters

Many of the topics discussed by participants in the Conversation on Health overlap; additional feedback related to this theme may be found in other chapters including: Chronic Disease management, Medical Services Plan, Primary Health Care, Health Care Models and Collaboration in the System.
Health Professionals

Comments and Concerns

- Doctors and the British Columbia Medical Association do not support patients’ right to choose alternative services.
- Doctors have become the gate keepers of medicine. They feel they have ownership of the medical system and a paradigm shift will be very difficult.
- The medical model is too focused on the physical aspects of health. Patients are people, not parts.
- Doctors do not have adequate training in alternate therapies and do not support their use.
- The public already frequents alternative practitioners and uses herbs and natural medicines; doctors should not be ignorant of these treatments.
- Doctors are threatened by alternate care and use of supplements, which results in a tendency to over-treat patients with conventional medicine.
- Patients accessing both allopathic and alternative practitioners are often pressured by their general practitioners not to waste their time and money on alternative therapies.
- There are no incentives to physicians to suggest alternative therapies; incentives come from billable hours and prescriptions.
- Practitioners not working in co-operation with each other in the best interests of the patient are fearful of jeopardizing patient welfare through the introduction of prescriptions that, combined with other therapies, may have negative patient interactions.
- Some medical researchers are closed-minded and less receptive towards understanding the holistic medicine approach.
- I think doctors inadequately know their patients. Rarely do you find one who asks about your nutrition, your stress levels, your digestive tract, your relationships, your sleep habits. All these things that affect one’s level of well-being.
- There is far too much reliance in traditional, allopathic medicine on drug treatment, rather than the root of the problem.
- Many of the medicines prescribed by traditional doctors either mask the pain or cause bad side effects.
- Allopathic practitioners often play with people’s health in trying different treatments, which they have no idea will be effective or not.
• Any medical doctor who is a member of the Canadian Medical Association can also practise alternative, complimentary methods.

• I am all for alternative medicine provided its benefits are proven and prescribed or recommended by a doctor.

• I think attitudes among conventional medical practitioners are changing.

• My general practitioner and my naturopathic doctor work together keep me as healthy as possible and therefore save the health care system from future costs associated with diseases that are now preventable or manageable.

**Ideas and Suggestions**

• Given patient first principles. It should be the expectation of the system that various experts collaborate, without prejudice, in the best interest of the patient.

• Change the disdain individual medical practitioners have for regulated complementary practitioners; the tradition starts in medical school.

• Preventative and symptomatic medicine can and must co-exist working together to bring human health to the greatest optimum level of living on this planet.

• Train all doctors to know a little about everything, including alternative therapies (for example, chiropractors or naturopathy). Blend traditional First Nations medicines with conventional Western medicines. Educate health professionals about different cultures and practices.

• Diminish reliance on drugs as cures; use other methods such as homeopathic.

• Doctors should be able to prescribe alternative drugs.

• Different professions have built research and need to share this information across medical disciplines.

• Introduce nutritional treatments in hospitals and allow our doctors to prescribe them.

• Free up medical doctors to use whatever products or devices they see fit for whatever condition they run across.

• The public needs to do more to remind people that there are services they can access before going to the doctor.

• The doctors of British Columbia need to visit European countries where allopathic and naturopathic traditions work side by side.
• Introduce mandatory education for health professionals on exercise and nutrition, and a sliding scale billing system to reinforce the shift in attitude along the lines of: highest payment for wellness checkups where holistic advice is given; next highest for illness checkups where holistic advice is given without the need for a prescription; and basic payment where prescriptions are provided.
• Doctors should be audited for properly prescribing drugs to ensure that they are not working for the problem.

**Socio-Economic Issues**

**Comments and Concerns**

• Low income people are seldom able to access alternative health care practices due to cost.
• Costs of alternative treatments are being borne by the patient regardless of their income level or ability to pay.
• There is reduced availability of complementary health care services, especially for lower income families.
• Some Registered Massage Therapists offer a sliding fee scale, which enables people with disabilities, seniors on limited incomes, residents of group homes and the working poor to receive needed massage therapy treatment.
• Unfortunately, the only people who are benefiting from naturopathy are those with enough money to pay for it privately.
• Some people need the financial support to access alternative therapies.
• Beneficial treatments by alternative practitioners are out of reach of some, especially pensioners.

**Ideas and Suggestions**

• Patients of medical doctors often cost the medical system over and over again because of increasing resistance to pharmaceuticals, adverse drug reactions, and continuing poor overall health. Our family, on the other hand, costs the medical system very little, but we pay a lot, even though we have a low income.


**Chronic Disease Management**

**Comments and Concerns**
- People are unaware that Traditional Chinese Medicine can cure or alleviate some chronic diseases.
- Restrictions to Medical Services Plan payments for alternative therapies have prevented many people from maintaining their health and alleviating chronic and sometime acute ailments.
- Naturopathic physicians have proven to be extremely useful in the treatment of chronic disease.
- Alternative medicine should be integrated into the health care system; currently, it is too expensive for many of those with chronic diseases.

**Ideas and Suggestions**
- British Columbians mentioned receiving benefits from the following supplements and treatments for their chronic illnesses:
  - Magnesium, Co-enzyme Q10 and fish oil supplements for cardiovascular illnesses;
  - ozone therapy;
  - St. John’s Wort for Depression;
  - valerian for sleep disorders;
  - Chinese kudzu for alcoholism;
  - flaxseed oil, omega-3, and Vitamin D for cancer treatment;
  - Prolotherapy instead of joint replacement;
  - Oblonga and saptrangi to treat diabetes;
  - Folic acid to treat stroke;
  - Chelation Therapy; and
  - Massage therapy for treating low back and neck pain, osteoarthritis, depression, and headaches.
- Macrobiotic diet does not only preserve good health; it can, in many cases, reverse the course of the sicknesses like cancer, heart diseases, and diabetes.
- Educate the public and health professionals that Traditional Chinese Medicine can cure or alleviate many chronic conditions.
Western medicine is best for acute emergency situations, where Eastern medicine is better for treating chronic illnesses.

I believe there are alternative therapies and medicines that can reduce risk factors in certain diseases so that there are less people who will require more expensive, conventional therapies.

Podiatry services for seniors with reduced hand function or mobility can prevent infections and other problems related to inappropriate nail care.

Massage therapy, physiotherapy and acupuncture are among these alternative therapies which have proved valuable to those suffering from chronic problems, such as osteoarthritis, soft tissue damage related to auto collisions, and workplace injuries. Naturopaths are successful and effective in treatment of allergy, lifestyle diseases and dietary problems.

Establish learning forums for people with different medical conditions.

Some ethnic groups, because of diet or other habits, experience some diseases with less frequency.

Education and Awareness

Comments and Concerns

Education about alternative medicine is greatly lacking in our school system.

Providing better information to the public about alternative medicines would help to level the playing field. We need to remove the barriers to accurate and complete information.

There is limited access to and knowledge about First Nations traditional medicines.

Provide information on First Nations traditional healing on website.

Although ample information on allopathic therapies and practitioners is available through the British Columbia Health Guide and the British Columbia Nurse Line, virtually no information is included regarding alternative therapies.

Over the past few decades, there has been a swing in public consciousness towards preventive and alternative practices that are still not fully recognized, acknowledged or supported by our government.
• Patients who use alternative medicine seem to become much more aware of the inner workings and connections of their body, mind and spirit. They cease being just a patient and become much more active and knowledgeable in their health care plan.

**Ideas and Suggestions**

• Create a help information line for people who want to use vitamins and herbs

• Naturopathic physicians can play a big role in our health care dilemma in helping to educate on lifestyle and noticing patterns that can lead to potential disease.

• Alternative practitioners could offer free 15 minute consults, just so somebody can get information without having to make any type of commitment.

• Provide education for children in schools and media exposure for alternatives; promote through television, on milk cartons, and other spots for general public awareness.

• A widespread program of government sponsored public education would encourage patients with soft tissue complaints to first seek massage therapy treatments from Registered Massage Therapists.

• Put more non-drug treatment options into British Columbia Health Guide.

• Information about alternative therapies should be available in the Health Guide and through the Nurse Line. Make it easier to access information about the range of health services available to the public.

• People need to be educated about using alternative therapy when antibiotics cannot treat the disease.

• Hip and knee replacements, and so on are valuable but it would be better to teach people how to move so they do not end up needing these kinds of operations.

• Promote and support breast feeding.

• Allow alternative health care providers to advertise their services and products through the media.
Complementary and Alternative Practitioners

Comments and Concerns

Training
Scope of Practice
Treatment

- Comments about training:
  - Alternative practitioners, such as chiropractors and naturopaths, do not have the same scientific training as Medical Doctors (MDs); they are not trained in universities.
  - I am concerned that the Ministry of Health is making a huge mistake by trying do away with the designation of Registered Aromatherapist. Registered Aromatherapists take specialized training in the essential oil blending, massage techniques, anatomy, physiology, and other courses that will give them the education to work with clients in a professional manner. Without this designation and training, any one could say they are an Aromatherapist.
  - I do not think that we can substitute someone with lesser training and expect them to deliver the same quality of health care.
  - I have used chiropractic, nutrition and physiotherapy and am completely impressed by the levels of knowledge and skill of the practitioners in these areas.
  - Naturopathic doctors save our current medical system tremendous amounts of money because they focus on prevention, education and curing diseases.

- Comments about scope of practice:
  - Naturopathic physicians lack access to certain services in the health care system (for example, x-rays, lab tests, visiting hospital in-patients).
  - The ability of our naturopathic physician to provide the care is compromised by outdated regulations. Any laboratory work that our naturopathic doctor determines is needed must be referred to our family doctor; naturopathic doctors also cannot refer patients to a specialist.
  - I am a practicing naturopathic doctor, and find it very frustrating not to be able to use a British Columbia provincial lab.
  - The idea that naturopaths might be able to refer people to specialists concerns me.
I see the waste of provincial funding by the medical profession’s general lack of knowledge in soft-tissue injury and their effects. Alternative therapies can make the health care system work more efficiently by way of patient education, and direct treatment and rehabilitation of soft tissue injuries.

I choose to go to a naturopathic doctor but I still need to go to a medical doctor for blood work and tests because that is what is covered. In the end, I spend more money and the services are duplicated because I have to see two doctors.

Hip and knee replacements have become pandemic. There are other treatment options to explore before surgery is employed.

Current research indicates that patients should try a course of conservative care (such as chiropractic or physiotherapy) for six months before many back surgeries should be considered.

Arizona permits naturopathic doctors a very broad scope of practice: prescribing rights, referrals, access to labs.

**Comments about treatment:**

I believe there is a strong corps of naturopathic doctors who do indeed offer valuable options which many of us desperately need, when standard therapies have not helped.

Alternative practitioners can take the time to educate patients about prevention and empowerment and, thereby, save money through early detection and treatment of many chronic diseases.

Chiropractors and naturopaths promote and build health with non-invasive procedures, vitamins, minerals, herbal supplements and healthy diet.

Alternative medicine looks at the whole person; treatment is often less expensive. I have seen too many traditional doctors prescribe a cornucopia of drugs that cause further problems for the patient.

Alternative therapies, such as Traditional Chinese Medicine, focus on the whole health of the person. They care about the fact that the person is out of balance. They recognize that the body wants to come back to health, and that it simply needs the support, through herbs, acupuncture and a relationship of trust and sharing with their health professional.

I refuse to go through with the doctor’s advice, which is to live on morphine to take away my pain. Instead, I am seeking alternative therapies to get rid of the pain altogether.
I have a chronic digestion problem and I visit my family doctor. I tried his prescription and came back several times; the improvement was minimal. Eventually, I tried alternative therapy. My problem was gone after three days.

Why is the chiropractic profession still being allowed to practice? This profession has injured many people, causing a huge expense to health care.

British Columbians noted that massage therapy has contributed greatly to treating many conditions, such as: chronic depression; Attention Deficit Disorder; Autism; developmental delays; eating disorders; and juvenile rheumatoid arthritis.

As a result of Celiac Disease and Irritable Bowel Syndrome, I sought alternative medical advice and have had great success through naturopathic medicine.

In 2006, I had surgery for colon cancer. At my own expense, I started a course of Traditional Chinese Herbal therapy and in July 2007 was discharged from Royal Jubilee Hospital Cancer Center with a test showing that I was cancer free.

**Ideas and Suggestions**

**Training**

**Scope of Practice**

- **Ideas about training:**
  - Naturopathic doctors’ education is just as detailed and scientific as medical doctors and our health care system could benefit financially by including them as a respected health care provider.

- **Ideas about scope of practice:**
  - Physiotherapists and chiropractors should be utilised sometimes before or without general practitioners visit. Physiotherapists and chiropractors should be visited first for musculoskeletal problems.
  - Traditional Chinese Medicine professionals should be able to treat their patients in the hospital; patients should be able to access dieticians without referral from doctor.
  - Naturopathic physicians who are trained in diagnosing, prescribing, and referring to specialists must be allowed to treat their patients in our public hospitals, and must be allowed access to laboratory testing, as other physicians are.
  - Alternative health care should be able to conduct initial assessments before patients go to a medical doctor.
• Herbs should be classified as drugs and be prescribed by qualified Traditional Chinese Medicine practitioners.

• Christian Science Practitioners and nurses want to be officially recognised and have the rights of patients who prefer to rely on healing prayer alone for there health care and recognise the valid needs of these patients equally.

**Administration**

**Comments and Concerns**

**Accreditation**

**Funding and Service Delivery**

• Comments about accreditation:
  
  • Naturopathic doctors follow scientifically sound practices as the recognized experts in natural therapeutics.

  • Naturopathic medicine is science-based primary health care that focuses on disease prevention and wellness.

  • Most alternative medicine is based on bad or no science.

  • Alternative practitioner cannot provide evidence to support their claims because they do not have access to health data.

  • The only thing I am opposed to are types of care that have no proven benefit. Prescribing marijuana to people without requiring that it be exposed to the same testing that other prescription drugs have to go through is ridiculous.

  • Health care resources should only be applied to treatments with proven health benefits; do not allocate funding resources to ineffective or unproven treatments.

  • Alternative and complementary medicine is far too loosely regulated, and definitely unproven. Mostly pharmaceuticals are prescribed, questionable blood testing done and in some cases downright dangerous practices are used.

  • Evidence-Based medicine has become the new buzz word in health care. The standard argument is that non-mainstream medicine is unscientific, unproven and therefore not worthy of inclusion in our publicly-funded health system.

  • There is a massive amount of clinical evidence proving that herbs, vitamins, essentials fatty acids, and so on have proven benefits. For a government to refuse to look at these proven benefits is not good.
• Acupuncture, massage, herbal, and other alternative therapies are based on medical practices that have been in existence for thousands of years.

• The recent designation of Traditional Chinese Medicine practitioners as doctors and primary care providers has established a positive precedent for other alternative therapy policy developments.

• **Comments about funding and service delivery:**
  - There are many health care services that provide support for health and well-being, even though they are completely disjointed; how do you integrate these services for the benefit of patients?
  - Incentives for doctors to practice in rural areas are more than double the total amount spent on supplemental services such as physiotherapy and massage therapy. This demonstrates the poor allocation of health care funds.
  - Cuts to the Medical Services Plan for alternative therapies have resulted in alternative practitioners moving to other occupations or geographic areas, thus creating a shortage of qualified resources for consumers.
  - I want the government to better monitor health professionals to protect the general public. There are people out there pretending to be doctors who are not.
  - I think great care should be exercised in incorporating alternative medicine in to the publicly-funded system. It should be defined just what procedures will be used, and the costs should be closely audited and regulated.
  - The requirement to have drug information numbers for herbal remedies forced many small producers out of the marketplace.

**Ideas and Suggestions**

**Accreditation**  
**Funding and Service Delivery**  
**Health Care Models**

• **Ideas about accreditation:**
  - Practitioners of alternative medicines should be certified.
  - While alternative medicine is not regulated, there are lots of proven alternative treatments to drugs and surgery that are provided by regulated health professionals. Naturopathic doctors, physiotherapists, chiropractors, massage
therapists and doctors of Traditional Chinese Medicine are all licensed and regulated by the Ministry of Health.

- Make any group that wished to be funded become a professional body and provide formalized proof of training and the efficacy of therapies to be funded.
- The provincial government should regulate and set standards for alternative medicine and medical treatments, including standardised scientific licensing exams.
- Remove the title of doctor from Traditional Chinese Medicine practitioners. The government should not include Traditional Chinese Medicine as part of Canada Health Act.

- Ideas about funding and service delivery:
  - Our health care system could be improved if wasted money, spent on natural remedies, was not an option that led into the mainstream health system.
  - Do not waste money on alternative medicine. It is the modern equivalent of the patent medicine salesman visiting rural communities in his wagon and selling snake oil to the country folk.
  - Spoon feeding pills and expensive diagnostic tests and operations only encourages dependency and increased disease care costs throughout the rest of the patient's lifetime.
  - Until we can be sure that alternative medicine helps and does not hurt, it should not be funded.
  - Complementary therapies should not be included under the pharmaceutical industry because the costs would escalate dramatically.
  - Re-commit funding to patient choice for treatment modality.
  - The Ministry of Health should consult alternative health care providers.
  - The federal government should be asked to fund a university evaluation of existing studies on various herbal treatments.
  - Funding the alternative system will also alleviate the shortage of doctors and specialist doctors.
  - Build incentives for preventing disease into the health care system; make alternative supplements and vitamins, Traditional Chinese Medicine, naturopaths, and homeopaths tax deductible.
  - Provide midwifery in the home.
Recognize the science behind complementary therapies; provide more research funding and support objective studies of complementary medicine.

There needs to be a return to a more traditional following of health care practices. Religion should be more at the forefront.

The long-term costs to the health system from a lack of formal follow-up for joint replacement surgeries make any short-term recovery trivial.

Is it not time to pass legislation forbidding the College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia from taking action against such doctors unless a serious complaint has been made to the College by a patient?

The government needs to honour the spirit of the Canada Health Act. Honour a patient’s right to choose alternative treatment.

When you look at the approach to such issues as natural health products and the way of aligning traditional medicines with Traditional Chinese Medicine, again, British Columbia has lead the way.

The Government of British Columbia has helped create a massage therapy profession that contributes to the health of patients from the birth to end-of-life.

The Government of British Columbia must be commended for its stated commitment to modernizing the health care system. In The Picture of Health, the patients first principles focus on such factors as access, effectiveness, efficiency, safety, equity, and appropriateness.

**Ideas about health care models:**

One aspect of the American system that should be looked at is the use of non-standard medical personnel such as naturopaths.

A recent trip to Australia highlighted these issues as naturopathic doctors are utilised by the general community for medical advice at least fifty percent of the time.

Many doctors in Australia also refer patients to alternative medicine practitioners and often work in conjunction with them to supplement each other’s advice.

In China, most hospitals have both Traditional Chinese Medicine and Western practitioners working together.

The best option for improved health for all is to promote and subsidize the production of raw goat milk such as Quebec is doing.
In order for health care to be sustainable, we must acknowledge alternate forms of medicine including chiropractic, homeopathic, physiotherapy, massage and herbal medicine along with nutrition and exercise.

Outstanding Questions

- How much provincial funding is being spent on seeking natural cures?

Medical Services Plan Coverage

Comments and Concerns

Cost of Alternative Therapies
Choice in the System

- Comments about the cost of alternative therapies:
  
  - It can often be more expensive to visit an alternative health practitioner, which can steer people away from excellent treatment options.
  
  - Alternative medicine has been helpful to a lot of people but it is too expensive to continue it for any length of time.
  
  - Chiropractic, acupuncturist and naturopathic services provide less costly, more effective results.
  
  - Complementary and alternative medicine is care for those that can afford it; British Columbia has a two-tier medical system.
  
  - It was the horrendous cost of the supplements and complementary treatments that finally turned me off. I do not think our public system can fund these treatments any more than it can fund the cost of all prescriptions meds.
  
  - Why are fees for chiropractors, naturopathic doctors, physiotherapists not covered by the Medical Services Plan? It is very disheartening to know that help is available but unaffordable for most.
  
  - If British Columbia takes a look at some European countries where they have integrated naturopathic doctors into the system, they are able to cut down on some of the costs; not everybody goes rushing into the medical doctor's office for this, that or the other thing.
  
  - It is good that complementary health care therapies are independent of our government funded health care system.
• **Comments about choice in the system:**

  - Previous cuts to payments for massage, chiropractic, naturopathic and other treatments demonstrate government's failure to provide treatment options for its citizens.
  - The system does not support people who use alternative medicine: they pay tax toward medical services they do not use, and then pay out of pocket for alternative therapies.
  - For me and many of my family members, we are already paying out of pocket for our medical expenses. We resent having to support a medical system that doesn't support our needs.
  - I believe the patient has the right to choose how they would like to be treated. This involves making all options viable and equally affordable. As it stands, patients have very little choice: they can go to a medical doctor.
  - I do not see why my choice of a doctor should cost me more money! Naturopathic physicians have the same amount of education, but possess potentially better knowledge for improving the health and well being of citizens.
  - It is ridiculous to expect people to take more responsibility for their own health if they are punished financially for making the effort. There are supplements that are extremely beneficial to an array of diseases or issues; however, they may be extremely expensive.
  - The public spends a lot of money on alternative medicine, which is not necessarily a savings to the health care system. It is still a cost to the economy and diverts funds from more effective measures.
  - I was dismayed when they were almost excluded from the medical health services. I had thought that British Columbia was extremely progressive in recognising the potential benefit that these modalities can have.
  - There are not a lot of options through the conventional system for treating conditions such as Irritable Bowel Syndrome. However, nutrition and dietary counselling are tremendously helpful.
  - There are now more options: acupuncture is more accepted; there is more information about alternative therapies; and more products are available in drug stores.
  - I also have to compliment you on your inclusion of midwives into the medical system. This is an awesome service that deserves to be promoted more.
Ideas and Suggestions

Cost of Alternative Therapies
Choice in the System

• Ideas about the cost of alternative therapies:
  • Fund alternative health care services under the Medical Services Plan, such as: naturopaths, aroma therapists, clinical counselling, herbologists, dental care, optometrist hearing aids, massage therapy and acupuncture.
  • Provide art therapy, music therapy, physiotherapy and horticultural therapy to long-term care residents.
  • Chiropractors are very accessible to treat acute and chronic conditions but are not being used or people cannot afford to go to them. Allow patients to choose chiropractors as a primary portal of entry to doctors, and make it affordable.
  • For using good preventative health and being less of a burden on the economy, why do I feel I am being punished financially? People need to be motivated to use the skills of natural health professionals to ease the burden on our system.
  • Patients of naturopathic doctors should be rewarded in some way by lower Medical Services Plan premiums.
  • I hope the Government of British Columbia incorporates alternative medical treatment into the Medical Services Plan. By ignoring non-allopathic medical treatment the government is forcing a larger and larger segment of the population to pay high prices for their own medical care.
  • Legalized marijuana as a medical alternative therapy.
  • People should be allowed to make a certain number of visits per year to the alternative professional of their choice.
  • People who are unable to use mainstream medication should be offered assistance in attaining medication from naturopaths. If you have allergies alternative therapists, for example naturopaths, are very important and can save the system big bucks.

• Ideas about choice in the system:
  • Preventative medicines, traditional medicines and ceremonies need to be recognized.
  • I think that everyone should have a choice as to who we see and part of the fee should always be covered by the government.
• There are areas of the health care system that can be improved through better integration of services provided by all health care providers, including naturopathic physicians, in a continuum of care that better reflects patient choice.

• Allowing patients to choose what type of treatment they want would save the province a lot of money.

• There should be more government funded research for non-lucrative processes and medications.

• Let the people decide what kind of medical help they need rather than limiting it to only one type of medicine. In so doing, health care money will be better spent in utilizing much cheaper and often more effective remedies.

• I can learn from visiting my holistic health practitioner and begin to care for myself and my family through this relationship. It is enabling me as opposed to making me rely on someone else, or another system.

• I believe that anyone who uses naturopathic or holistic services should do so at their own risk.

**Outstanding Questions**

• How will British Columbia bring alternative health care into the provincial system?

**Alternative Care Providers in the Team Based Model**

**Comments and Concerns**

• Practitioners such as Chiropractic and naturopathic care are excluded from health care and this limits the general public’s understanding of what they do.

• Naturopathic doctors have restricted laboratory and referral privileges.

• Many doctors still shun alternative medical practitioners.

• Allopathic physicians do not currently accept that other practitioners have a place in the medical system.

• There is a division in primary care between naturopathic and general practitioners.

• The general practitioners have so much power and will not be willing to open up to other types of non-mainstream alternatives.

• Some doctors will not see a patient if she is using a midwife.
Doctors will not send test results to alternative practitioners.

Lack of collaboration and acceptance between alternative providers and medical providers.

Alternative and traditional practitioners often too reactive to each approach.

Concerns was raised that some patients suffer verbal abuse from their practitioners when they confide that they are seeking alternative care methods.

Medical doctors do not recognize the benefits of natural methods and their attitude prevails amongst themselves. There is a bias of medical people towards those whose choose not to use pharmaceutical drugs or conform to the health system.

There is a great reluctance on the part of doctors to refer patients to other types of health care which in many cases be of assistance. This due to a lack of knowledge, familiarity with, or competitive concern.

The Doctors and Surgeons Association will not allow a doctor to refer to alternative methods.

There is no hospital chaplain. People need for spiritual support.

Ideas and Suggestions

Registered massage therapists, opticians, chiropractors, acupuncturists, naturopaths, nurse practitioners, pharmacists, homeopaths, and therapists are a cheap and effective first source of care rather than seeking out a Medical Doctor.

There should be one wing in hospitals with a free Naturopathic Doctor, herbalist, acupuncturist, osteopath, massage therapist, Chiropractor etc and a free fully equipped fitness center open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

My neurologist monitors my Multiple Sclerosis. My family doctor takes care of my annual checkup. My naturopath, however, did more testing and had longer conversations with me about my health history, environmental factors, stress and diet than any other health care professional before him.

I think a collaborative effort between mainstream and alternative medicine could do a lot to get patients back to living productive lives. With the availability to tests and equipment by mainstream doctors, there could be a closer monitoring of a patient's progress while undergoing alternative treatment.
• Practitioners of alternative medicine should be encourage and compensated. Both standard and alternative health care should be encouraged to participate within the spectrum of collaborative practice.

• Educate alternative medicine practitioners on how to read charts. Create a common language for all professionals.