

Patient perspectives: barriers to complementary and alternative medicine therapies create problems for patients and survivors.

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There are multiple barriers to better understanding of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) approaches and the use of natural substances to reduce cancer risk. CAM approaches are not patentable, and the pharmaceutical industry has no interest in the area. Research generally approaches concepts from the deconstructionist side: there may be interest in herbal mixtures but its "active" constituents are explored one at a time, missing any synergistic or even additive effects. Little attention has been paid to environmental pollutants and exposures. Most patients believe these are active causes of their disease, but researchers are still exposing animals to one chemical one time, which fails to duplicate human exposures. Attention to lifestyle issues is presented almost solely in terms of obesity--a concept that is a barrier to change by itself. Research animals rarely if ever are fed dietary components that humans normally eat, such as soda or diet soda, potato chips, and high-fructose corn syrup, artificial colors, artificial flavors, other additives, or combinations of bad fats with too much sugar, too much salt, and artificial ingredients. Long-term treatment effects on survivors may not necessarily require a solely pharmaceutical approach. Drugs to treat each condition separately may require even more drugs to offset the unwanted effects of each. Whole systems approaches to research are urgently needed. A final barrier is that once a treatment is accepted in mainstream, it ceases to be considered "alternative." The genesis is soon forgotten and the remaining alternative modalities continue to be viewed with suspicion, doubt, and misunderstanding, to the detriment of both patients in treatment and cancer survivors.

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