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Alternative medicine: Doubtful treatment or a powerful healing force

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Alternative medicine is an approach to healing used in place of conventional medicine. Complementary medicine, on the other hand, is used together with conventional medicine. For example, if a special diet is used to treat cancer in place of surgery recommended by a conventional doctor, the diet would serve as an alternative therapy. However, if a special diet were used to combat high cholesterol levels in a patient with heart disease, in addition to coronary artery bypass surgery, the diet would serve as a complementary therapy. Since the same therapy can serve as either complementary or alternative, the various therapies outside the domain of conventional medicine are often grouped together under the term CAM (complementary and alternative medicine) therapies. The increasing interest in alternative medicine,

which attempts to treat a patient's body, mind, and spirit, can be viewed as a measure of the spiritual hunger in our high-tech society. The desire within the medical community to integrate treatments for a patient's spiritual needs as well as physical needs is validating the importance of pastoral care in the hospital setting. Perhaps an approach to healing that makes use of the strengths of both conventional medicine and alternative medicine would enable a person to experience the best of both medical worlds. The forms of alternative medicine with scientific backing could be used to maintain health and increase physical fitness, while conventional medicine could be used to accurately diagnose and eradicate disease. Certain cautions, however, should be observed.

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