

## Complementary, alternative and integrative medicine during cancer treatment: A Clinician's Guide

This resource is to help clinicians working with people with a cancer diagnosis to initiate discussions on complimentary, alternative and integrative medicine (CIM). It provides evidence-based resources to help you provide up-to-date advice.

### Background

People with cancer may try CIM to treat their cancer, assist with the side effects of treatment, or help them to cope generally.

#### Definitions

- Complementary medicine refers to non-mainstream therapies that are used alongside conventional treatments, often with a goal of enhancing effectiveness and/or reducing symptoms.
- Alternative medicine refers to non-mainstream therapies that are used in place of conventional treatments. Their scientific basis and efficacy are often unknown and sometimes have even been disproved.
- Integrative medicine refers to the practice of delivering conventional and commentary medicines together in a co-ordinated way that considers the holistic needs of the person.

#### The Health Professional's role

For a person considering dietary or herbal supplements, it is important they are well informed about any pros and cons, and have discussed this with their medical team.

The literature tells us that patients often do not disclose their use of CIM to health professionals for reasons including not being asked, thinking that it is not relevant and/or concern of being judged. If a patient does have a conversation about CIM with a health professional and is not provided with adequate information, they may seek information from other sources which may not be credible or safe. It is therefore recommended that *clinicians initiate* discussion in a non-judgemental manner using empathy and active listening skills.

It is suggested that clinicians refer to the ***Clinical Oncology Society of Australia (COSA) Position statement on the use of complementary and alternative medicine by cancer patients*** (<https://www.cosa.org.au/publications/position-statements/>) for a comprehensive outline of recommendations and evidence-based resources to support them to have these discussions.

There is an ethical obligation to ensure patients are well informed, particularly where there is strong evidence of supplements with potential negative/harmful effects. As long as there is no harm or interaction with conventional treatments, most clinicians accept patients trying complementary therapies and acknowledge these can be beneficial for the mind and soul.

### **What does the research say?**

At present, there is limited research with conclusive evidence on many supplements. It is important to remain open-minded, however, as new information becomes available.

Full list of references available from:

Morey B and Brown T. A review of evidence-based practice in nutrition related complementary therapies: improving the knowledge of dietitians. Cancer Forum. 2011; 35 (2) via [www.cancerforum.org.au](http://www.cancerforum.org.au).

### **Where can I get further information?**

The following websites/resources are useful to check the latest research, interactions with medications, communication tools and links to other useful resources:

- Cancer Council Helpline 13 11 20 and iHeard website (<https://iheard.com.au/>)
- Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center (<http://www.mskcc.org/mskcc/html/11570.cfm>) and About Herbs application (<https://www.mskcc.org/cancer-care/diagnosis-treatment/symptom-management/integrative-medicine/herbs/about-herbs>)
- Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database ([www.naturaldatabase.com](http://www.naturaldatabase.com))
- PEN Nutrition <http://www.pennutrition.com/index.aspx>
- Therapeutic Goods Administration (<http://www.tga.gov.au/index.htm>)
- Up-To-Date (<http://www.uptodate.com/patients/index.html>)

- National Cancer Institute – Complimentary and Alternative Medicine for Health Professionals ([Complementary and Alternative Medicine \(CAM\) for Health Professionals - National Cancer Institute](#))
- National Centre for Complementary and Integrative Health ([National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health \(nih.gov\)](#))

### Summary statement

- It is every clinician's responsibility to initiate a discussion about CIM use using non-judgemental and open language
- Refer to ***Clinical Oncology Society of Australia (COSA) Position statement on the use of complementary and alternative medicine by cancer patients*** (<https://www.cosa.org.au/publications/position-statements/>)
- Be familiar with evidence-based resources for both you and your patients