

In-Class Activity: Learning about different forms of CAM

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Pre-Reading

Alex Broom. 2009. “‘I’d forgotten about me in all of this’: Discourses of self-healing, positivity and vulnerability in cancer patients’ experiences of complementary and alternative medicine”. *Journal of Sociology* 45(1). [p. 71-87]

Goals of Today’s Activity

1. To understand why patients turn to Complementary and Alternative Medicines
2. To compare across different forms of Complementary and Alternatives and identify differences and similarities in their approach to health and wellness
3. To critically assess the limitations of integrating Complementary and Alternative Medicines with biomedical approaches to healing

Pre-Activity Discussion

1. What are some examples of Complementary and Alternative Medicines that you have encountered in your day-to-day life?
2. Why would some people turn to Complementary and Alternative Medicines?
3. What are some questions that you have about Complementary and Alternative medicines?

Part 1: Review Four Sources

These sources are: (1) from the NIH’s National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, (2) another source that describes the same techniques/CAM from a practitioner standpoint, (3) patient testimonials from a practitioner’s website, and (4) a news article from the *New York Times*.

Links to Dropbox for Sources:

- [Ayurvedic Medicine](#)
- [Traditional Chinese Medicine](#)
- [Chiropractics](#)

Some considerations as you review these sources:

- It would be helpful here to split up the work **and assign one source to each group member** and have them report back what they learned from each source
- Think about what types of expertise do these CAM practitioners bring to the table
- How do patients perceive the advantages of this type of CAM, and for what conditions
- Discuss how you will weigh the claims and evidence, as well as the limitations of each sources (e.g. when looking at patient testimonials, recognize of course that this is a biased sample chosen by the practitioner to showcase on their website)
- What more would you like to know about this CAM that is not in the material you reviewed? If you have time, do an online search to supplement these sources.

Part 2: Poster Design

Then together, use the poster to teach the class about what forms of treatment CAM offers for patients. I leave it to you to determine the layout, how much text to include, whether you include any illustrations, etc. There are markers for your use and poster paper. On the poster, make sure to cover:

- Include the name of the CAM in a clear legible font so that we can see it from afar
- How does this CAM approach health and wellbeing?
- What are some of the therapies that this CAM offers for patients?
- What are common conditions that patients face when seeking out this CAM?
- How do patients describe their interactions with this CAM? Are these interactions mostly positive? What are the perceived benefits?
- What are some critiques and limitations of this approach of CAM? Have doctors and scientists voiced concerns over its use?

Post-Activity Discussion

1. What did you learn in today's activity about Complementary and Alternative Medicines?
2. How should allopathic medical providers and physicians talk to patients who turn to Complementary and Alternative Medicines?
3. What is the connection between cultural and national identity and Complementary and Alternative Medicines, in particular those that are based on indigenous knowledge?