



On 23 May 2015, the CPME Board adopted the 'CPME position paper on complementary and alternative treatments' (CPME 2013/130 FINAL).

CPME position paper on complementary and alternative treatments

The development of modern medicine since the 20th century enables patients to receive effective treatments based on evidence provided by medical research founded on commonly accepted scientific methodologies. Despite this many patients seek care given by service providers of traditional, alternative and complementary practices and remedies

As any treatment can benefit from the placebo effect; CAM, where no effective drugs are used or procedures without scientific evidence of effectiveness are performed, benefit from this effect.

Physicians, when meeting patients using or seeking to use non-established products or traditional, CAM practices, should always inform their patients about the treatment options that provide the best clinical outcome and the risks associated with the use of traditional, complementary or alternative practices.

While the practice of medicine in EU member states is assured in part through the statutory regulation of healthcare professionals, medicines, medical devices and healthcare products, in many EU member states most traditional, complementary and alternative practices and products are unregulated and may pose significant risks to the health and safety of patients. Alternative practices and advertisers of alternative products often claim to cure specific illnesses and conditions without scientific or medical evidence to support that claim. Patients may be led into choosing to use traditional, complementary and alternative practices instead of medical treatment, resulting in a possible delay of proper scientific medical diagnosis and allowing their condition to worsen and in some cases leading to early death.

Legal measures are required to prevent providers of alternative practices and therapies from making unfounded promises and using misleading advertising. Patients and citizens should be actively informed of the possible negative effects of discontinuing medical treatments advised by their physicians and replacing them with other methods not proven effective by medical science and practice. In addition, patients should be aware that any delay in seeking medical care by replacing it with alternative practices may lead to worse outcomes in the long term.



CPME is an organisation that seeks to guarantee the highest standards of medical practice and promote the highest quality of medical care and patient safety. Where complementary therapies and products are being used CPME is of the opinion that:

- Every patient deserves the best possible treatment based on scientific evidence.
- All existing treatments must be constantly re-evaluated for efficacy and safety. All new diagnostic or therapeutic methods must be tested in accordance with scientific methods and ethical principles (such as the [Declaration of Helsinki](#)).
- Patients who inform their doctors that they are seeking alternatives to medical science must be provided with unbiased information on the nature of these treatments. Physicians should be aware that some groups of patients, such as patients with cancer, psychiatric conditions or severe chronic illnesses and children are particularly vulnerable to risks associated with alternative practices. Where such situations occur, doctors should discuss it with their patients when using CAM treatments along with their existing medical treatment.
- Physicians using any practices or methods should always look for their scientific basis and evidence.
- The public should be informed that traditional, alternative and complementary practices are not a specialty within medicine and therefore forms of certified training within these areas does not constitute specialist training.

The CPME is gravely concerned at the widespread lack of legal regulations safeguarding patients who choose to primarily look for traditional, alternative or complementary treatments. In this context the CPME is of the opinion that:

- The EU should insist that individual Member States should establish stricter provisions safeguarding patients treated with traditional, complementary and alternative practices given by various providers. When found harmful, there should be a mechanism stopping or considerably limiting any specific complementary and alternative treatment in order to protect public health.

EU and national legislators within their respective competence should ensure that the trust of patients and citizens is not abused by permitting misleading information concerning efficacy of conventional medical treatment or of complementary or alternative treatments.

- Public health care budgets should support only treatments found effective and safe.