

## **Time to Talk: Patients and Health Care Providers Need To Discuss Complementary and Alternative Medicine Use**

Do you ask your patients about their use of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM)? According to a recent national survey conducted by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) of the National Institutes of Health in partnership with AARP, two-thirds of people aged 50 and older are using some form of CAM, but 69 percent are NOT discussing use with their physicians. Full disclosure of all health care therapies is essential to every health care provider's evaluation and ensures safe, coordinated care for the patient.

CAM is a group of diverse medical and health care systems, practices, and products that are not presently considered to be part of conventional medicine. CAM includes products and practices such as herbal supplements, meditation, chiropractic, and acupuncture.

“Health care providers must be aware of all health care therapies—both conventional and CAM—their patients are using,” said Josephine P. Briggs, M.D., director of NCCAM. “Because CAM use is increasing, an open dialogue is critical to patient care.”

Respondents of the NCCAM/AARP national survey cited the most common reasons why doctor-patient dialogue is lacking as:

- The physician never asked (42%)
- They did not know they should (30%)
- There was not enough time during the office visit (19%).

**SAMPLE QUOTE FROM MEMBER:** *“Since most patients do not proactively disclose use of CAM, health care providers need to ask,” said John Smith, M.D., (title). “As more patients use CAM therapies, health care providers need a full picture of all conventional and CAM practices they are using so that they can most effectively manage their care.”*

### **Tips for discussing CAM use with patients:**

- Include a question about CAM use on medical history forms
- Ask patients to bring a list of all therapies they use, including prescription and over-the-counter medications, herbal therapies, and other CAM practices
- Have a nurse, nurse practitioner, or physician assistant initiate the conversation.

NCCAM has a new provider and patient educational campaign – *Time to Talk* – to encourage the discussion of CAM use. *Time to Talk* has a FREE toolkit for health care providers with materials including posters, tip sheets, patient wallet cards, and other resource information. For a free toolkit, call the NCCAM Clearinghouse at 1-888-644-6226 or <http://nccam.nih.gov/timetotalk/>.

**Federal Resources on CAM:**

- **National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine at the National Institutes of Health** – [www.nccam.nih.gov](http://www.nccam.nih.gov) or 1-888-644-6226
- **CAM on PubMed**  
*Journal citations specific to CAM* – [www.nccam.nih.gov/camonpubmed/](http://www.nccam.nih.gov/camonpubmed/)
- **Online Continuing Education Series**  
*Video lectures for CME/CEU credits* – [www.nccam.nih.gov/videolectures](http://www.nccam.nih.gov/videolectures)