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## The Alternative Fix - Talking Points

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## Frontlines: The Alternative Fix

By Derek Wilmott  
11/30/2007

In the past several decades there has been resurgence in the popularity of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) in this country. For a short while CAM was considered quackery in this country. But under pressure from everyone; Congress, major hospitals, and medical schools have embraced these therapies. It is has become so commonplace now to have alternative medical treatments, that an entire center of the National Institute of Health is devoted to studying them.

What exactly is complementary and alternative medicine (CAM)? The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) defines CAM as “a group of diverse medical health care systems, practices, and products that are not presently considered to be part of conventional medicine.” Some of the more known types of CAM’s are acupuncture, chiropractic, homeopathy, aromatherapy, and Reiki.

While watching this film, think about the following issues:

- 1) The mainstreaming of alternative medicine - Currently, Americans spend some \$48 billion each year on alternative medicine. Yet there was a time when alternative medical practices were not always so widely accepted or well received, especially by the traditional medical establishment. Today, NCCAM has a budget of \$115 million and a staff of seventy, and is conducting more than 200 research projects on CAM therapies. In addition, more than 20% of U.S. hospitals now offer some form of alternative therapy alongside their conventional medical treatments.
- 2) The CAM controversy - Millions of Americans have embraced CAMs, but such therapies are not without their controversies. Critics cite that many of these treatments are based purely on anecdotal reports of favorable results and not scientific research required of conventional medical treatments. Hospitals that offer dubious treatments, give credibility to therapies that may not only be ineffective, but harmful to the patient. Those defending alternative therapies say that they are responding to their patient’s demands. If they do not offer these kinds of programs, than the threat is that patients will go elsewhere.

Questions to consider:

1. Is it ethical for hospitals to offer alternative therapies?
2. Why do you think people turn to alternative medicine?
3. Do you think CAMs have more credibility now with the current medical establishment? Will this change the way medicine is practiced today?
4. What role do you think the placebo effect play on the efficacy or perceived efficacy of alternative therapies?

5. Will alternative medical therapies become more commonplace in the current medical establishment?