The Use of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) in Children Ignore at Our Peril

It is indeed a challenge to precisely define the term complementary and alternative medicine or CAM. The National Institute of Health in the United States defines CAM as: “Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) is a broad domain of resources that encompass health systems, modalities and practices and their accompanying theories and beliefs, other than those internal to the dominant health system of a particular society. These may include herbs and remedies perceived to have health effects that are associated with positive health outcomes.”

CAM therapies are known for the treatment of migraine including acupuncture (now endorsed by the British Medical Association as a form of treatment), homeopathic remedies (including colloidal chiropractic), relaxation methods, magnesium, vitamin B2, Co-enzyme Q10 and ginger and herbal remedies (including Feverfew and Butterbur patsans).

Colic

Cats may affect up to 25% of all infants. It can be particularly frustrating for parents when a otherwise healthy infant has excessive crying for no apparent reason. Treatment modalities include natural health products (such as fennel, chamomile and peppermint), baby massage and interventions include parents desensitizing and looking for sensory factors that induce crying symptoms in their infants with colic, infant massage has been found to be comparable to a crib vibrator in reducing crying in babies with colic. As parents desperately search for something to ameliorate crying symptoms in their children, CAM therapies are used frequently for children and families may choose CAM for a variety of reasons including the perception the CAM therapies are more in their own control, because they see them on supermarket shelves and do not see them as different from other therapies they may try an alternative therapy where they feel mainstream medicine has somehow failed them. Despite this trend of increased CAM use, many doctors are largely untreated in the topic and often cannot give informed advice when families do raise the issue.

Some CAM is likely to be good therapies with important roles in health care of children. A rational, informed adult is clearly entitled to use any treatment, including CAM, for themselves. Special issues arise when parents who want to administer CAM to their children. These are likely to be parents who wish to avoid, or at least minimise, the use of conventional medicine. It is suspected that the use of CAM is increasing in paediatrics but figures are sketchy. In 1992, only 11% of infants with colic were prescribed any form of treatment, those based on CAM, but by 1998 the use of CAM therapies in infants with colic, infant massage has been found to be comparable to a crib vibrator in reducing crying in babies with colic. A ketogenic diet which is high in fats and low in carbohydrates and it is used in children who have drug-resistant epilepsy were placed on this therapy. The number of seizure decreased by 1/3 as compared with a controlled group. This has been the first randomized controlled trial of the use of alternative medicine in place of conventional medicine. It is indeed a challenge to precisely define the term ‘complementary and alternative medicine’ or CAM. The National Institute of Health in the United States defines CAM as: “Complementary and Alternative Medicine is a broad domain of resources that encompasses health systems, modalities and practices and their accompanying theories and beliefs, other than those internal to the dominant health system of a particular society. These may include herbs and remedies perceived to have health effects that are associated with positive health outcomes.”

Headaches

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It may not be easy for us to engage with health care paradigms that are quite foreign to our own medical training, but we owe it to our patients to attempt to do so and be much more informed on the topic.

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