Factors Influencing the Inclusion of ‘Complementary and Alternative Medicine’ (CAM) in Undergraduate Medical Education

The above research project, funded by the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland, is aimed at examining the inclusion (or otherwise) of ‘Complementary and Alternative Medicine’ (CAM) in medical syllabi. UK medical schools will form the basis for this research project, which initially seeks email responses to a limited set of questions from senior colleagues involved in medical syllabus design and delivery. A subsequent aim is to follow up where applicable by conducting semi-structured interviews (either face-to-face or by telephone).

Specifically, this project aims to identify factors that influence the adoption of CAM into medical syllabi, to examine the forms of CAM that are being integrated into medical syllabi, and to explore the ethical dimensions associated with such inclusion. The factors that influence inclusion (or exclusion) of CAM in medical education may include (inter alia): personal viewpoints; knowledge of research evidence; contact with other health professionals; patient feedback; societal pressures; personal experience; funding pressures; and student feedback. The nature of CAM provision will also be explored. For example: which CAM approaches are taught? What are the criteria for choosing these approaches? Is CAM taught as a set of “how to” techniques, or is critical evaluation by the student required?

Decisions to include/exclude CAM are not made in an ethical vacuum, and there exists, in common with many elements of contemporary medical education, ethical concern surrounding the question of CAM inclusion/exclusion in syllabi. For example, CAM may find ethical favour amongst some because it is claimed to be an expression of patient autonomy, whereas CAM may be ethically questioned on grounds of inefficacy, safety and resource implications. Such ethical issues are likely to influence decisions on the inclusion/exclusion of CAM from medical syllabi.

All answers will be treated in the strictest confidence. Answers will not be identified by institution name or interviewee name. I hope this research will lead to more attention being given to the issue of CAM within medical syllabi.