

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH

Overmedication: Problems and Solutions

Witness before the  
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs

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Chairman Sanders, Ranking Member Burr and members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to be here today to discuss the need to improve pain management strategies to reduce overmedication and opioid dependency. My name is Josephine Briggs, M.D., I am the Director of the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM), one of 27 Institutes and Centers at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and the Federal government's lead agency for supporting scientific research on complementary practices and integrative health interventions. Our mission at NCCAM is to define the usefulness and safety of complementary and integrative health practices and their role in improving health through rigorous scientific investigation. Our research priorities are driven by scientific promise and public health need. We support the study of complementary interventions, approaches, and disciplines across the continuum of basic, translational, efficacy, and effectiveness research.

Complementary, alternative and integrative health practices are defined as having origins outside of mainstream conventional medicine. They include both self-practices like meditation, yoga, and dietary supplements, and health care provider administered care such as acupuncture, and chiropractic, osteopathic and naturopathic medicine. As these modalities are increasingly integrated into mainstream health care, NCCAM is committed to developing the evidence needed by the public, health care professionals and policymakers to make informed decisions about their use and integration into medical practice. In addition to supporting the research, we disseminate the latest evidence based information on these approaches to scientists, health care providers, and the general public through an information website ([www.nccam.nih.gov](http://www.nccam.nih.gov)) and other media.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 30 to 40 percent of Americans use complementary and integrative health practices, spending some \$34

billion in 2007.





traumatic brain injury, substance use disorders, anxiety, and sleep disturbances often experienced by veterans and military personnel. The initiative requested research approaches to (a) mind-body interventions such as mindfulness meditation-based stress reduction approaches, (b) yoga, (c) acupuncture, (d) art therapy, (e) massage, and (f) cognitive behavioral interventions. Grant applications are currently under review, and we look forward to funding multiple studies later this year. Research findings from these initiatives are expected to lead to enhanced patient care and improved pain and symptom management through better integration of evidence-based complementary approaches.

At my direction, a special Working Group of the National Advisory Council on Complementary and Alternative Medicine is currently studying the effectiveness of complementary and alternative medicine approaches for the treatment of chronic pain. The Working Group is expected to report its findings to the Council in the next few months.