



Alternative Medicine Lecture

Welcome everyone. Today we are going to look at alternative medicine.

Turning first to definitions, alternative medicine is defined loosely as a set of products, practices, and theories that are believed or perceived by their users to have the healing effects of medicine, but whose **effectiveness has not been established using scientific methods**.

Q.31

Its theory and practice is not part of conventional medicine. Conventional medicine is that part of medical science that applies principles of biology, physiology, biophysics, and other natural sciences to clinical practice and uses scientific methods to establish the effectiveness of that practice. Instead, it may be based on hearsay, religion, tradition, superstition, and belief in supernatural energies. And some more negatively say it is based on pseudoscience, errors in reasoning, propaganda, fraud, or other unscientific sources.

Some people say though, that **alternative medicine cannot be precisely defined because of the diversity of theories and practices it includes**, and because the boundaries between alternative and conventional medicine overlap, are porous, and change.

Q.32

Now we'll look at some of the common types of alternative medicine, and what they are based on. Alternative medicine practices are diverse in their foundations and methodologies and practices may be classified by their cultural origins or by the types of beliefs upon which they are based. Methods may incorporate or be based on traditional medicinal practices of a particular culture, folklore knowledge, and **superstition** for example.

Q.33

Alternative medicine is often based on traditional ethnic systems, such as traditional Chinese medicine, Ayurveda in India, or practices of other cultures around the world. Of course this may not be seen as alternative in the country or place it **originated** from, but it is considered alternative when it is used outside its home region.

Q.34

It's very common for some alternative theories to be based around herbal remedies and other substances. They use substances found in nature such as herbs, foods, non-vitamin supplements and megavitamins, and fungal products. However, herbal medicine includes not just the use of **plant products**, but may also include the use of animal and mineral products. This is among the most commercially successful branches of alternative medicine, and includes the tablets, powders and elixirs that are sold as "nutritional supplements".

Q.35



Some alternative therapies are based around religion, faith healing, and prayer. As an example, there is Shamanism, which is a religious practice that involves a practitioner, or a shaman in this case, who is believed to interact with a spirit world through altered states of consciousness, such as trance. The goal of this is usually to direct these spirits or spiritual energies into the physical world, for healing or some other purpose. **Q.36**

Ok, now we'll talk about issues around their safety. There is a general scientific consensus that alternative therapies lack enough scientific proof that they work, and their effectiveness is either unproved or disproved. Many of the claims regarding the effectiveness of alternative medicines are controversial, since research on them is frequently of low quality and methodologically flawed. So for these reasons, some doctors believe people may not be getting a treatment that will help them. **Q.37**

The Scientific Review of Alternative Medicine journal points to confusions in the general population – a person may attribute symptomatic relief to an otherwise-ineffective therapy just because they are taking something. This is something called the placebo effect, which is when we take something that does not contain an active substance meant to affect health, but we feel better because we think it has helped us. So in other words, the natural recovery from illness gets misattributed to an alternative medicine being taken. **Q.38**

Because of these concerns, in the past, alternative medicine had a lack of support from medical scientists regarding access to research funding, sympathetic coverage in the medical press, or inclusion in the standard medical curriculum. However, this is changing, as some conventional doctors offer alternative medical treatments, and introductory courses or modules can now be offered as part of standard undergraduate medical training. Alternative medicine is taught in more than half of US medical schools and US health insurers are increasingly willing to provide reimbursement for alternative therapies. So it's perhaps now not seen to be as dangerous as it used to be. **Q.39**

Ok, that's the end of the lecture. Any questions? **Q.40**