

VA TAP – Technology Assessment WATCH – June 2004

This E-mail newsletter, produced by the **VA Technology Assessment Program (VATAP)**. We produce evidence-based systematic reviews of the medical literature in response to requests for policy or clinical guidance sent through the Chief Patient Care Services Officer. **TECH WATCH** provides health technology assessment (HTA) reports & resources in VA with links to evidence-based resources from around the world:

---Complementary & Alternative Medicine--In Search of Evidence---

Complementary & Alternative Medicine [CAM] – Seeking Evidence & Safety Data

Defining CAM: According to the NIH National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, CAM is a group of diverse medical and health care systems, practices, and products that are not presently considered to be part of conventional medicine.

Evidence Equates Effectiveness: With the growing popularity of CAM, VHA practitioners are seeking ways to integrate those CAM therapies into veterans health care for which high quality scientific evidence of safety and effectiveness exists. Technology assessment, utilizing its evidence-based process for assessing treatment efficacy, is well suited to identifying which CAM interventions work. This issue of TECH WATCH focuses on evidence-based resources in CAM.

Evidence-Based WEB RESOURCES on CAM:

The New Zealand Health Technology Assessment Unit, developed an evidence-based website, on complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) <http://www.cam.org.nz/> It provides evidence-based information on the safety and efficacy of a range of CAM treatments. The three new reports below were recently added to this new resource. They highlight three conditions frequently seen in VA patients:

Spinal Manipulation – Chiropractic – for Chronic Long Term Low Back Pain: This report summarized the evidence on the efficacy of spinal manipulation for chronic low back pain from a total of eight systematic reviews published since 1999, and 150 clinical trials. To see the full report click here:

http://www.cam.org.nz/back_pain_chronic.htm

Acupuncture for Osteoarthritis: This evidence summary identified three health technology assessments, three systematic reviews, and 21 clinical trials (758 patients) on acupuncture for the management of osteoarthritis. To see the report click this link:

<http://www.cam.org.nz/osteoarthritis.htm>

Horse chestnut seed extract for the treatment of chronic venous insufficiency: Chronic venous insufficiency (CVI) results in skin changes, pain on walking or after prolonged standing, swelling, and the development of non-healing wounds. An extract made from the seed of the horse chestnut tree is often used in herbal medicine as a treatment for CVI. This evidence summary identified three systematic reviews, 18 clinical trials (involving 1,258 people), and three observational studies (involving 10,725 people) on the use of horse chestnut seed extract (HCSE) for CVI. To see the positive results from this project report click this link: <http://www.cam.org.nz/chestnut.htm>

National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) at NIH is dedicated to exploring complementary and alternative healing practices in the context of rigorous science, training complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) researchers, and disseminating authoritative information to the public and professionals.

<http://nccam.nih.gov>

BMJ Ongoing Series on CAM

The British Medical Journal, BMJ, publishes a series on CAM while requiring rigorous adherence to well demonstrated research evidence. The link below takes you to their CAM collection where you can sign up for a weekly update. A few recent articles are below along with an editorial by a distinguished expert in the evidence-based technology assessment world, Iain Chalmers.

http://bmj.bmjournals.com/cgi/collection/complementary_medicine

US consumer group names "dirty dozen" dietary supplements by Janice Hopkins Tanne. BMJ 2004;328:975 , doi:10.1136/bmj.328.7446.975-c

Acupuncture for chronic headache in primary care: large, pragmatic, randomised trial. Andrew J Vickers, et al. BMJ 2004;328:744, doi:10.1136/bmj.38029.421863.EB

Editorial by Iain Chalmers: **Well informed uncertainties about the effects of treatments: How should clinicians and patients respond?**

<http://bmj.bmjournals.com/cgi/content/full/328/7438/475>

BMC Complementary and Alternative Medicine Journal. An open access (free access) journal on Biomed Central <http://www.biomedcentral.com/bmccomplementaltermmed/>

The Cochrane Collaboration Consumer Health Web Site.

<http://www.informedhealthonline.org/item.aspx>

THE COCHRANE COLLABORATION HAS VERY STRICT STANDARDS & GUIDELINES FOR HEALTH INFORMATION EVIDENCE AND DISSEMINATION. YOU CAN SEE THEM HERE:

<HTTP://WWW.INFORMEDHEALTHONLINE.ORG/ITEM.ASPX?TABID=22&PAGEREQUEST=2>

QUACK WATCH: Quackwatch, Inc., is a nonprofit corporation founded by Dr. Stephen Barrett in 1969. Its purpose is safety-to combat health-related frauds, myths, fads, and fallacies. Quackwatch focuses on quack-related information that is difficult or impossible to get elsewhere. It has developed a worldwide network of volunteers and expert advisors who identify questionable claims, report illegal marketing of medicines/consumer products and therapies, and attack misleading Internet advertising. Check out their web site for reports on a wide variety of 'treatments' such as magnets, plus an interesting look at the Institute for Medicine's Panel on Complementary & Alternative Medicine---Dr. Barrett looked into the members' direct or indirect economic interests in the project's outcome, and made some very interesting discoveries. <HTTP://WWW.QUACKWATCH.ORG/INDEX.HTML>

CAM Safety in the News:

WHO REPORT WARNS OF RISKS

The World Health Organization on Wednesday June 23 issued a report that said the increased popularity of alternative medicine "poses global health risks" and that governments worldwide should "tighten oversight of the natural-medicine industry," the Wall Street Journal reports. According to the report, in some industrialized nations, as much as 65% of residents have used alternative medicines or therapies, and in developing nations, as much as 80% of residents may use traditional medicines for their primary care. The report also said that adverse reactions and injuries from alternative medicines and therapies have doubled in the past three years. The risks of alternative medicines and therapies include paralysis caused by unqualified manual therapists, herbal products contaminated with heavy metals and herbal products that cause adverse reactions when combined with prescription drugs. Unlike some nations such as Germany, China, Canada and Australia, in the US herbal products are considered dietary supplements and are not regulated by FDA. Xiaorui Zhang, coordinator of traditional medicine at WHO, said, "Natural doesn't mean safe. There are a lot of quality problems with herbal medicines, and many practitioners are not reliably trained or licensed" (Spencer, Wall Street Journal, 6/24). Vladimir Lephakin, WHO assistant director-general for health technologies and pharmaceuticals, added that governments worldwide must improve control over herbal products (Reuters Health, 6/23).

OOPS Department: Vitamin B Study finds Opposite Effect with Stenosis Patients taking Folates:

High doses of vitamin B, previously thought to help keep arteries clear after a coronary stent is inserted, actually do the opposite, researchers found. The study, published in today's New England Journal of Medicine, found that 34.5% of patients taking the B vitamins experienced significant reclosing of arteries, compared with only 26.5% taking a placebo, or dummy pill. A link to the article is attached here:

<http://content.nejm.org/cgi/content/full/350/26/2673>

VA TAP produces evidence-based systematic reviews of the medical literature in response to requests for policy or clinical guidance sent through the Chief Officer of Patient Care Services. Our reports address the use of health care technologies (such as any device, process, drug, or therapeutic intervention) in the veteran population. For more information & access to all our publications, plus links to HTA resources around the world, check out the **VA TAP** websites: <http://www.va.gov/vatap> <http://vaww.va.gov/vatap>

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