

The Cochrane CAM Field at the University of Maryland Center for Integrative Medicine

The Complementary Medicine Field is an international group of individuals dedicated to facilitating the production of systematic reviews of randomized clinical trials in areas such as acupuncture, massage, chiropractic, herbal medicine, homeopathy and mind-body therapy. The CAM Field, founded in 1996 and coordinated by the University of Maryland Center for Integrative Medicine, has worked steadily to meet the growing demand for information about CAM therapies among both practitioners and the general public by identifying published clinical trials of alternative therapies, summarizing these into rigorous scientific reviews, and disseminating these reviews to the general public and to healthcare providers.

### **A Collaborative Enterprise**

To accomplish the formidable task of identifying and summarizing all published CAM clinical trials, collaboration with other groups around the world is essential; the Center serves as a member group of the Cochrane Collaboration, an international organization of more than 9000 contributors from over 80 countries. The Center for Integrative Medicine is the official Cochrane Collaboration designated site or *Field* for complementary medicine.

Cochrane Collaborators work to prepare up-to-date reliable summaries, or

systematic reviews, of every kind of healthcare therapy. These reviews answer questions about healthcare and guide people in practical decision-making about treatment. The global network of Cochrane Collaborators allows the Field to research therapies from other cultures, including those that may have been inaccessible to Western researchers in the past.

### **Organizing Information**

The Field is constantly developing and updating its databases of clinical trials and systematic reviews, as well as widely disseminating these healthcare information resources through the Internet. The Center for Integrative Medicine has been working to develop these databases since the Cochrane Field was registered in 1996, and the databases now include over 7,000 randomized clinical trials and 250 systematic reviews. A comprehensive database of clinical trials, serving as a 'one-stop shopping' source for CAM reviewers, is a vital to the Field. The ultimate objective in developing the database of CAM trials is to provide a comprehensive source of relevant studies. The Field's databases are unique in including only the highest quality studies -- RCTs and systematic reviews -- organized in an accessible, easily searchable web-based format.

### **Training Researchers**

The Field's workshops, held at the International Cochrane Colloquia and

elsewhere, present participants with the challenges of and strategies for establishing an evidence-base for CAM. This training serves as an excellent introductory overview, providing experienced researchers, as well as healthcare advocates and consumers, with sufficient and adequate knowledge to begin a systematic review.

### **Improving Methodology**

The CAM Field at the University of Maryland Center for Integrative Medicine works to support the improvement of methodology through the funding and publication of research, as well as through education. Review of methodology, already well underway in conventional medicine, is important to ensure the validity and quality of the research, and should become standard practice in CAM as well.

### **Disseminating Information**

The Field undertakes various projects to disseminate reviews widely among healthcare providers and the general public. For example, in an initiative to bring Cochrane reviews directly to the attention of healthcare providers, the CAM Field publishes a column on Cochrane reviews in *Explore* and *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, the most widely read medical journal covering CAM. The column features an abstract of a Cochrane review, presents an interpretation of it, and explains its application to patient care.

These columns increase the availability and visibility of high-quality clinical trial and systematic review evidence for CAM practitioners and for physicians integrating CAM therapies into conventional medical care.

To ensure that this information reaches the general public, the Field works with the Cochrane Consumer group to create single page *fact sheets* on specific CAM therapies reviewed. Cochrane reviews are long and complex, often including more than fifty pages of detailed description of methods used to identify, analyze, and summarize the clinical trials included. The fact sheets include only basic information of interest to the general public, including a brief description of the therapy and listings of commonly recommended uses and reasonably reliable adverse effects. These fact sheets are published on the Field's website and other Cochrane Collaboration websites so that they are available to the public.

### **NCCAM Funding**

In May 2007, the National Institutes of Health awarded the Center a \$2.1 million four-year grant to sustain and continue the essential work of the Cochrane CAM Field at the University of Maryland. The NCCAM grant supports the CAM Field's objective of informing healthcare consumers and providers of the benefits and risks of complementary and alternative therapies.



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### **Contact Information**

The Center for Integrative Medicine  
University of Maryland School of Medicine  
Kernan Hospital Mansion  
2200 Kernan Drive  
Baltimore, MD 21207-6697  
USA

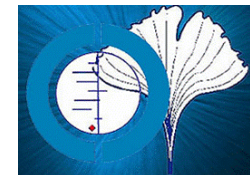
Academic Office: 410-448-6871  
Fax: 410-448-6875  
Patient Appointments: 410-448-6361  
[www.compmed.umm.edu](http://www.compmed.umm.edu)



University of Maryland School of Medicine  
Center for Integrative Medicine

## The Cochrane CAM Field at The University of Maryland Center for Integrative Medicine:

### *A brief introduction*



Cochrane Collaboration:  
[www.cochrane.org](http://www.cochrane.org)

Cochrane CAM Field:  
[www.compmed.umm.edu/cochrane](http://www.compmed.umm.edu/cochrane)

