Conventional and Alternative Provider World Views: Reductionism versus Holism

**Background:** Several studies have reported the prevalence, costs and reasons for use of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) in the United States. Few studies have addressed differences in conventional and CAM provider viewpoints that might account for the increased consumer interest in and use of CAM practices.

**Objective:** To explicate the world views of conventional and CAM providers.

**Methods:** This ethnographic study compared the world views of conventional (i.e., physicians, nurses, pharmacists, dietitians), and community-based CAM providers (e.g., homeopath, naturopath, acupuncturists, yoga, mindfulness, tai chi practitioners) based on brainstorming statements the practitioners provided for a larger survey of patterns of use of CAM among military veterans.

**Results:** Groups were similar in their queries regarding training in, costs, and knowledge of CAM. Conventional providers focused on concerns regarding adverse effects of CAM, alternatives if CAM did not work, CAM/prescription interactions, and distrust of doctors as a motivator for CAM use. CAM providers, however, emphasized holism, spirituality, active listening, lifestyle changes for illness prevention, client responsibility for health, as well as health and wellness practice guidelines.

**Conclusions:** These differences in world views may be explained, at least in part, by the philosophical underpinnings of reductionism taught in traditional Western medical schools, and holistic thought as an integral part of Eastern healing and lifestyle practices. The Eight World Hypotheses framework integrates these two broad world views.