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*THE OPTIMAL AGING AND MIND-BODY-SPIRIT CURRICULUM SERIES:
MODULES FOR MEDICAL AND HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL
EDUCATION*

***MODULE 6: Optimal Aging and Complementary and Alternative
Healthcare in Working with Geriatric Patients - Mind***

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Learning Objectives

1. Define complementary and alternative healthcare approaches.
2. Define mind-body medicine.
3. Give a commonly used definition of optimal aging.
4. Explain how osteopathic and allopathic medicine approaches are compatible with complementary healthcare.
5. Explain the major difference between complementary and alternative healthcare approaches.
6. Identify at least three complementary or alternative healthcare approaches that emphasize the spirit or spirituality as the main pathway to health and explain what they are and what they do.
7. Explain why medical and healthcare professionals should be knowledgeable about, and familiar with, complementary and alternative healthcare approaches emphasizing the spirit or spirituality, especially when working with older patients.

Lecture

As we have done before in this module series, we will briefly cover some previously covered key concepts because these concepts set the foundation for our review of complementary practices today. We will start by looking at the definitions of complementary or alternative medicine, mind-body medicine and optimal aging.

Alternative or complementary healthcare derives its name from being alternative or complementary to allopathic medicine, which typically involves the use of drugs, surgery, or rigorously tested FDA-approved modalities of treatment. Alternative or complementary medicine typically involves the use of natural substances, such as herbs, essences, and oils, and the use of mind, body, and spiritual techniques. The terms are often used interchangeably, but it should be noted that generally, alternative healthcare uses techniques that are alternative to conventional medicine techniques and complementary healthcare uses techniques that are in addition to conventional techniques. It should also be noted that at some point in time, probably every medical technique was considered complementary or alternative to conventional techniques, until sufficient testing, research, and standardization of procedure was done. Finally, different medical philosophies vary in what they consider standard and complementary techniques, e.g. allopathic medicine does not include osteopathic manipulation as a conventional technique, whereas for osteopathic medicine, it is a foundational technique.

Mind-body medicine, popularized by Deepak Chopra, MD, and integrative medicine, popularized by Andrew Weil, MD, include approaches from all branches of healing modalities: allopathic, osteopathic, and complementary or alternative techniques. Once again, the terms are often used interchangeably. Mind-body medicine focuses on the interactions between the brain, the body, the mind, and behavior. It also focuses on the ways in which emotional, mental, social, spiritual, experiential, and behavioral factors affect health. Integrative medicine focuses on integrating effective practices from all branches of medicine.

The National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH), located within the National Institutes for Health (NIH), is one of the largest and most complete resources for scientifically based information about complementary and alternative medicine. Among other resources, it provides literature reviews, clinical guidelines, a dictionary of practices and approaches, and reviews of research. Much of our discussion will be based on NCCIH information.

In working with geriatric patients, it is useful to have a framework for treatment. Dr. Ken Brummel-Smith, MD, a noted geriatrician, has provided an easy working definition of optimal aging that is commonly used by clinicians, geriatricians, and geriatric patients: Optimal aging is the capacity for function across many domains - physical, functional, cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual - to one's satisfaction and in spite of one's medical condition.

Osteopathic medicine supports this definition of optimal aging, through application of its foundational principles that focus on the whole person, on the capacity of the body to heal itself if given the right conditions, on the use of OMT to support healing of the body, and being patient-centered rather than disease-centered. Other types of medicine have similar philosophies of treatment. Allopathic medicine supports this definition of optimal aging, through its efforts to relieve symptoms of disease or malfunction, reduce or eliminate pain, and to improve quality of life for patients.

In other modules, we have discussed (1) demographics of aging, (2) optimal aging, (3) complementary and alternative approaches to healthcare, (4) complementary techniques that primarily use the body as the entrance point for care, and (5) complementary techniques that primarily use the mind as the entrance point for care. Geriatric patients often use a combination of methods, techniques, and practices in their healthcare to improve their quality of life, so we are reviewing many of the most commonly used types of complementary healthcare techniques that might be used by your geriatric patients. Here we will be discussing alternative techniques that primarily use the spirit as the entrance point for care.

People often assume that spirituality and religion are synonymous, but that is not necessarily so. Spirituality is broader than religious belief. Thus, although many religions have a spiritual component, spiritual activities and beliefs extend way beyond any one religion. As Linda Keilman, PhD, points out, religion does not equal spirituality, and spirituality does not equal religion. Whereas in times past, religion was centered on a building and a group of people, now religious and spiritual beliefs are expressed and fostered in many settings, including support groups, home-centered Bible studies, and retreat centers. From being formal (Sunday dress, Sunday or Sabbath events, celebration of religious holidays in ritualistic ways), now we find that many churches and religious centers have added to their events. They have incorporated popular music, allowed less formal dress, included all ages and other members of the community, allowed audience participation, and even changed seating arrangements. This has been done in an effort to be more contemporary, appealing and relevant to participants. In the same way, spiritual events have blossomed, in many types of venues, involving many types of people, programs, types of learning, and activities. Many people find these activities, both religious and spiritual, to be comforting, soothing, healing, centering, social, and personal. In particular, some of the activities specifically seem to have a stress-reducing or healing component, and we will be discussing some of those here.

Affirmations are positive verbal statements that one says to oneself in a relaxed state of mind. Many people find that, over time, the use of affirmations can create healthier energy patterns in the mind and body. Affirmations are often used to relieve stress and chronic pain, and to promote conditions in the body that foster healing of many conditions. They are simple to do, cost nothing, and can make a difference in a person's physical and mental condition. Affirmations have been, and can be, used to address improvement in or healing of physical conditions, mental conditions, relationship issues, abundance or lack of it, and, yes, even spiritual growth.

To make the best use of affirmations to promote personal growth, well-being, and self-healing, it is generally recommended that a person start by identifying the condition to work on, and then identify an affirmation to use, which is a simple statement with positive intent. Typically, a person will start by writing the affirmation out and saying it

aloud, several times a day, for example 10-20 times a day, and 2-3 times a day. As a person gets more comfortable with this process, he or she may switch to repeating the affirmation silently, but continuing to say it several times a day, at several intervals. It is believed that, with enough repetitions, a person can change their underlying thinking about a condition, leading to permanent change in belief and attitude, which ultimately leads to a change in the physical or mental condition.

The use of affirmations can be traced back more than a century ago to a French pharmacist named Emile Coue, who ran a free clinic for patients. He suggested that patients say the following affirmation 20 times a day: "Every day in every way, I am getting better and better." He used many more affirmations in his work, but this is one of the most common, and it remains in use by many people to this day. He believed what many people today believe: that physical conditions in the body often start in the mind and changing thought patterns in the mind can result in changes in the physical body.

Louise Hay is a popular author, teacher, and lecturer who has written more than 50 books and been a leader in self-healing and metaphysics for more than 30 years. In her writings, she explains what affirmations are and how they can be used. She teaches that all physical conditions have an underlying mental component and that if one changes the underlying mental component, one can also address the manifesting physical condition. In her earlier work, she compiled a long list of medical conditions and then identified the underlying problematical mental thoughts that may contribute to each condition. She then suggested a positive affirmation to positively address the situation, which she said might help a person in changing that condition. In her more recent writings, she has teamed up with Mona Lisa Schulz, MD, a board-certified psychiatrist, with a PhD in neuroscience. They have tied Hay's earlier works together with current research and scientific findings, and pulled together many tools for supporting personal growth and self-healing for a range of conditions.

Affirmations for release of stress and spiritual growth might include such ideas as the following:

- I am supported by life.

- I am safe.
- I am loved.
- I have faith.
- I am at peace.

Meditation, which was discussed in Module 5, is a broad category that includes many different techniques, approaches, and styles, and it can be used for many different purposes. Typically, a person who is meditating focuses attention on a word, an object, or the breath. Meditation can be used to increase calmness or relaxation, for health purposes to help deal with a specific condition or to improve overall wellness, and for spiritual development. Most types of meditation have similar characteristics:

- Meditation is usually done in a quiet location, free from distractions, although there are also walking forms of meditation, and some people regularly meditate anywhere, anytime.
- Meditation is usually done in a comfortable posture, which can be sitting, lying down, standing, or walking.
- Meditation usually includes focus of attention, which can be a word or set of words, a mantra that is a specifically chosen word or set of words, an object, or even simply the breath.
- Meditation involves keeping an open attitude, which lets distractions, thoughts and emotions come and go without focusing on them, gently bringing the attention back to the focus of attention when one becomes aware that the mind has wandered.

Meditation styles can include contemplation, in which a person thinks deeply about some subject; and concentration, in which a person focuses on some object or idea, such as a picture, a statue, a candle, or something in nature. Generally, meditation can be used for health purposes for conditions such as anxiety, pain, depression, addictions, stress, insomnia, and many physical and emotional symptoms of chronic illnesses, as well as general overall wellness. All types of meditation help to balance the mind, body, and emotions.

Prayer is an activity that almost everyone recognizes, and have probably done at some point in their lives. According to Richard Gerber, MD, prayer can be considered a type of spiritual affirmation that can bring about healing, change, and spiritual growth. Prayer can be done in many ways, but commonly is done with heads bowed and eyes closed, to better focus on the ideas being expressed. However, prayer can be done while standing, sitting or moving, silently or verbally, and can be directed at such entities as a deity, a spirit, a loved one, to the Light, or the Universe. It can be ritualistic, memorized, or more casual. It typically involves communication with a power greater than one self does, and many people believe it can bring about peace and healing.

In their book How God Changes Your Brain, Andrew Newberg, MD, and Mark Robert Waldman present research findings and suggest that spiritual activities do no harm and can actually change a person's brain in fundamentally healthy ways. They specifically identify eight different activities that can do so: smile, stay intellectually active, consciously relax, yawn, meditate, do aerobic exercise, engage in dialogue with others, and have faith.

Visualizations are mental images of something that you want to see, occur, or have happen. The greater the detail in a visualization, the stronger and more forceful it becomes. Some teachers recommend incorporating all the senses in visualizations – sight, sound, touch, smell, hearing, and even tasting, if appropriate. These mental pictures are often used to accompany affirmations, requiring a person to use greater focus, and giving more power to the new reality a person wishes to create. Recent research has shown that visualization can be helpful in dealing with stress-related conditions, as well as recovery from many illnesses. For example, visualization is often a tool used in cancer-recovery programs.

Keeping a **gratitude journal** is an interesting method to focus on what is good in one's life. All too often, we seem to focus on our problems rather than the things that make us happy or for which we are grateful. Keeping such a journal can help a person change their focus from negativity and complaint to recognition that every life has things in it that can be appreciated. The idea is simple: every day the person writes down things

that happened that day for which they are grateful. A person can aim to write a certain number of things, like three things or five things. What is important is to spend some time thinking about the day and writing something down every day. Over time, this can help a person move their thinking from one of negativity and complaint to a more positive and even happier attitude.

Conclusions: Not all of these approaches will appeal to every person. For example, some people may either gravitate towards, or be opposed to, prayer, based on their religious beliefs. Some people may not be good at creating visual pictures in their mind and so, for them, visualizations may be difficult and therefore not so helpful. Some people may find that sitting still and meditating is hard. They may prefer to do walking meditations, or to use affirmations and visualizations while they are engaged in other activities.

Because there are so many different options, every person can probably find one or more of these methods easy to do and helpful. Because these methods are so simple and generally no- or low-cost, you will probably encounter many patients, especially your geriatric patients, using one or more of these methods. This is the reason it is important for you to familiarize yourself with these techniques. It is also important for you to know where to get reliable information about them, for your own knowledge and to share with your patients. One very good source of evidence-based information on all kinds of alternative and complementary methods of healthcare is the National Institutes of Health, National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health website (www.nccih.nih.gov).

You will likely find, as you work with your geriatric patients, that as they age they begin to think more seriously about issues such as death, life after death, God or Higher Powers, and the role of spirit in their lives. Keilman points out that spirituality increases with aging. People may already be using some of the techniques discussed in this module. They may be using these techniques because they are dealing with some illness or chronic condition. Some individuals may be using these techniques because they are concerned about these issues and are growing in spirituality as they approach

their own demise. You may want to explore with your older patients if they are doing so, or if they would like more information about any of these types of techniques. You will recall that Brummel-Smith included consideration of the spiritual dimension of life as one of the factors to consider in optimal aging. Engaging in discussions with your geriatric patients on these topics can support them, give them additional ways to aid in improvement or recovery from chronic conditions, help them relieve stress, or otherwise bring them peace. Additionally, you will show yourself to be an exceptional medical or healthcare practitioner.

Experiential Activities

Assignment

1. Pick one approach and practice it 10 minutes every day for one week. You can learn more about how to practice your chosen technique by going to the NCCIH website and researching it. You can do an internet search on the topic. Journal your research experiences and your daily practice experiences.
2. Pick another approach and try it once during the week. You can learn more about how to practice your chosen technique by going to the NCCIH website and researching it. You can also do an internet search on the topic. Journal your research experiences and your one-time practice experience.
3. Pick a third approach that you know little or nothing about and just read about it using the NCCIH website as your learning resource. Again, if you want more information, do an internet search. Journal your research experience.
4. Come to class prepared to discuss your research experiences, your technique practice experiences and what you learned.

List of Practices to Choose From

- Affirmations
- Meditations
 - Breathing meditation
 - Mantra meditation
 - Walking meditation
 - Contemplation
 - Concentration

- Prayer
- Visualizations
- Gratitude journal - Identify and journal at least 5 things you are grateful for each day

Questions to Address in your Journal

- What do you think about the techniques you worked with?
- Do you think the techniques work? Did you notice any difference in your moods or how you physically felt after practicing them?
- Did it make a difference if you did a technique every day, or just once during the week? What kind of a difference?
- Would you do them again? Would you continue them on a regular basis? Under what conditions?
- Would you recommend the use of any of your three chosen techniques to your geriatric patients? To others? For what purposes?
- What was your experience using the NCCIH website? Was it easy to use? Would you use it again? Would you recommend it to others? Why or why not?
- What was your experience doing other Internet searches on any of the practice techniques? Would you recommend any particular type of search to others? Why or why not?

Class Discussion Questions of Experiential Activities

- What were your experiences with your chosen techniques?
- Do you think they work?
- Would you do them again?
- Would you like to try any of the others? Which ones? Why?
- Would you do your chosen techniques regularly? Just under certain conditions? For specific conditions? If so, which circumstances and which conditions?

- Would you recommend use of any of these techniques to others? To whom? For what purposes?
- What did you learn when you explored the NCCIH website? Was it easy to find information? Would you use it again? Would you recommend the website to your patients, as a resource?

Lecture Discussion Questions

1. Define complementary and alternative healthcare.
2. Define mind-body and integrative medicine.
3. Define optimal aging.
4. How do the above concepts work together?
5. How can complementary and alternative healthcare approaches be useful in your work with geriatric patients?
6. Identify three complementary and alternative healthcare approaches that use the mind as the starting point for techniques that affect the whole body.
7. Would you use any of those approaches yourself? For what purposes? How could you go about learning more regarding any of the mind-body approaches emphasizing the mind?
8. How might you deal with a geriatric patient who is using complementary techniques focusing on the mind? Why are they using those techniques? Are they getting the results they want? Would you encourage them to continue? Why? Might you tell them to stop any particular approach? If so, which would you recommend stopping and why?
9. Would you be likely to recommend to your geriatric patients any complementary techniques using the mind as the main approach? If so, which ones? Why? For what purposes?
10. Could you recommend places where your patient might get more information on these subjects? If so, where?

Main Teaching Points

1. Definition of alternative or complementary healthcare approaches: Approaches to healthcare that are considered alternative or complementary to allopathic medicine (which typically involves the use of drugs, surgery, or rigorously tested FDA approved modalities of treatment). Alternative or complementary medicine typically involves the use of natural substances, such as herbs, and essential oils, and the use of mind, body, and spiritual techniques. The terms alternative and complementary are often used interchangeably, but generally, alternative healthcare refers to techniques and approaches that are alternative to conventional medicine, and complementary healthcare refers to techniques or approaches that are complementary to conventional medicine.
2. Definition of mind-body medicine or integrative medicine: Integrative medicine involves the best approaches from all branches of healing modalities: allopathic, osteopathic, and complementary or alternative medicine. Mind-body medicine focuses on the interactions between the brain, the body, the mind, and behavior. It also focuses on ways in which emotional, mental, social, spiritual, experiential, and behavioral factors all affect health.
3. The National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH), located within the U.S. National Institutes for Health (NIH), is one of the largest and most complete resources for scientifically based information about complementary and alternative medicine.
4. A solid, practical, and useful framework for working with geriatric patients has been developed by Ken Brummel-Smith, MD, a noted geriatrician. He provided an easy working definition of Optimal Aging that is commonly used by clinicians and others working with geriatric patients.
5. Definition of optimal aging: Optimal Aging is the capacity of the geriatric patient for functioning across many domains – physical, functional, cognitive,

emotional, social, and spiritual – to one’s satisfaction and in spite of one’s medical condition.

6. Osteopathic medicine supports this definition through emphasis on foundational principles of Osteopathic Practices and Principles (OPP) that focus on working with the whole person, the capacity of the body to heal itself if given the right conditions, the use of Osteopathic Manipulative Treatment (OMT) to support healing, and being patient-centered.
7. Allopathic medicine supports this definition through its emphasis on its efforts to relieve symptoms of disease or malfunction, reduce or eliminate pain, and to improve quality of life for patients.
8. Geriatric patients will often use a combination of conventional medical approaches and complementary or alternative health approaches, for many reasons.
9. For maximum effectiveness, healthcare professionals need to be familiar with the various types of treatment approaches (traditional and non-traditional!) their geriatric patients may be using, so they can provide and coordinate the best possible treatment plan.
10. Examples of mind-body approaches that use the spirit as the main pathway to affect the whole person include affirmations, meditations, prayer, visualizations, and gratitude.
11. Familiarity with and exploration and experience of these and other complementary techniques is encouraged for all healthcare professionals, so they can best work with their geriatric patients who will often be using one or more of these techniques. This also supports the concept of optimal aging.

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