

Complementary and Alternative Medicine for Children – Time to Enter the Evidence- Based Era

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ABSTRACT

Children receive natural health products and other forms of complementary and alternative medicine that lack evidence of safety and efficacy. The Toronto Hospital for Sick Children has established a national research support program to address this knowledge gap. A May 2007 Toronto Scientific forum presents cutting edge research in this area.

Thousands of children in Canada are receiving natural health products and other forms of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) as part of their management.^{1,2} In the vast majority of cases these treatments are not prescribed by physicians. Moreover, very often physicians are not even aware of them, do not inquire about them, and parents do not necessarily volunteer such information. Most critical, the vast majority of these remedies and therapeutic modalities are applied to children without appropriate evidence of either safety or efficacy.³

To fill this void, in 2002 the Toronto Hospital for Sick Children's Foundation has established the first ever research support program for pediatric complementary and alternative medicine. The Program includes several pillars:

- 1) A yearly research grant competition.
- 2) Graduate studentships in CAM research.
- 3) Cross training bursaries to clinicians practicing CAM and vice versa.

To facilitate interactions among researchers and practitioners in this emerging field and dissemination of the research conducted under this program Sick Kids Foundation has been hosting biannual meetings in Toronto. In the third biannual forum held in Toronto on May 4, 2007, several types of research directors are presented by researchers granted support by the Foundation, as well as studies supported by other sources:

- Surveys on the use of CAM in pediatric subgroups.
- Pilot studies of novel CAM methods in children.

- Systematic reviews and meta-analyses of safety and efficacy of natural health products and other CAM methods.
- Basic research on the pharmacology and toxicology of natural health products.
- Novel methodologies to study CAM in children (*e.g.*, N of 1 series).

The abstracts of the meeting, appearing in this issue, reflect a growing enthusiastic community of traditional and alternative clinicians and researchers in the area of pediatric CAM.

These activities are critical steps towards creating a climate where infants and children will receive CAM modalities with proven safety and efficacy at a level of evidence expected from any other therapeutic method, such as medicinal drugs to speech therapy.

REFERENCES

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