

When Is Complementary and Alternative Health Care (CAHC) in the Best Interests of the Child?

Andrew P. Milroy

CAHC

- CAHC is a multi-**billion** dollar a year industry
- 20%-30% of general pediatric patients have used 1 or more CAHC
- Use among adolescents ranges from 50%-75%
- Rates among patients with chronic, recurrent, or incurable conditions 30%-70%

Dilemma

- Health care professionals are not always certain when CAHC is in the best interests of the child

What has been reviewed

- Between July and August I reviewed over 100 sources on CAHC, including books, articles, policies, and case studies

Best Interests

- CAHC can be used on the child when it is in the best interests of the child
- Which treatment option is in the best interests of the child?
- **“The best obtainable estimate of what a reasonable person would consider the highest net benefit among the available options.” (Encyclopedia of Bioethics)**

Best Interests

- Consideration to the following should be given when making a decision in accordance with best interests
 - Chances of survival
 - The harms and benefits of treatment
 - Evidence of long- and short-term medical outcomes of the treatment
 - Long term implications for the child or adolescent's suffering and quality of life

Best Interests

- “The values, beliefs, and preferences of the family also play an important role in decision making and should not be ignored when considering the best interests of the child or adolescents.”

CAHC can be used...

- CAHC **can** be used after meeting certain requirements
- This does not mean that it **should** be used
- Meeting the requirements **does not** show that CAHC is in the best interests of the child
- What it does show is that CAHC is an acceptable treatment **option**

The Requirements

- Health care professionals can engage in non-traditional practice unless it poses a greater risk to the patient's health, than traditional medicine would
- Conventional treatment has failed, **or** there is no proven accepted treatment

Requirements Cont.

- The treatment does not interfere with known curative therapies
- Essential medical care continues **and** there is little danger of the side effects from the CAHC

Requirements Cont.

- The CAHC will not expose the patient to any degree of risk/harm with no proven offsetting benefit
- Research results are promising

Requirements Cont.

- The decision to use CAHC will be an informed one
- **The health care professional believes that the patient receiving CAHC will benefit from it**

Treatment Options

- If the CAHC in question fulfills all of those requirements it can be considered a viable treatment **option**
- CAHC can then be considered along with other possible treatment options when determining which one is in the best interests of the child

Final Comments

- CAHC is not going away
- It is important to educate ourselves on how to approach difficult decisions now, so that it is not rushed when it is come across in practice
- Talk to parents openly, in a non-hostile manner, about CAHC