



Pulse

Looking for an alternative

A survey conducted by the Fraser Institute revealed that 73% of Canadians had used at least one alternative therapy at some point in their life. Chiropractic was the most common therapy used, being cited by 36% of respondents, followed by relaxation techniques and massage at 23%. Prayer was cited by 21% of respondents.

Exactly half reported using at least one alternative therapy in the previous 12 months, but within this group only 44% discussed this fact with their physician. More than half of these respondents (53%) felt it was unimportant for their doctor to know and 39% thought that it was none of their doctor's business. Some (22%) thought

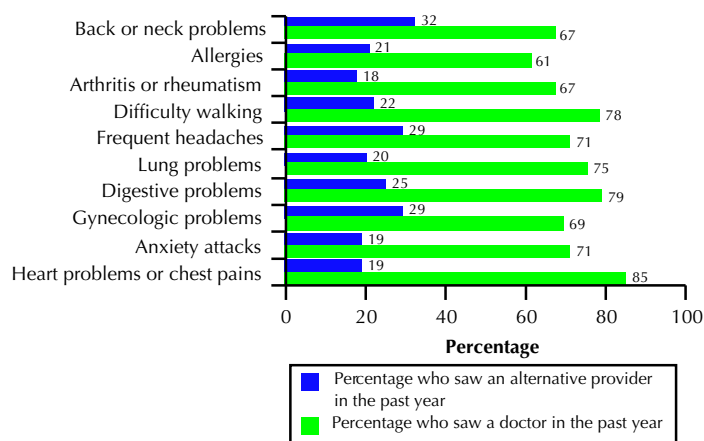
their doctors would not approve and 21% felt their physician would discourage them from seeking alternative care. Most (72%) believed that using alternative medicine in combination with conventional medicine is better than using either alone.

Canadians spend an estimated \$3.8 billion on alternative medicine every year. This includes provider fees (\$1.8 billion), books, medical equipment, herbs, vitamins and special diet programs; \$3.8 billion accounts for more than 16% of all private health care expenditures in 1995. By way of comparison, total annual capital expenditures in Canada's hospitals stood at \$2.1 billion in 1995.

Most respondents (60%) felt that alternative medicine should not be covered by provincial health plans but should remain a private expense.

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Survey of people seeing a medical doctor or other provider for conventional or alternative medical care



Source: Alternative Medicine in Canada, The Fraser Institute, 1999

Plastics debate continues

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scientific literature. That report, *The use of Di-2ethylhexyl-phthalate in PVC medical devices: exposure, toxicity and alternatives*, concluded that "humans are exposed to substantial levels of DEHP through medical devices." According to Dr. Tee Guidotti of Edmonton, founder of the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment and a member of HCWH, "sick patients with lots of treatments are exposed to high levels of DEHP, and because they're sick, it may make them more susceptible to DEHP."

But Koop's group examined 86 scientific reports and its report, *A scientific evaluation of health effects of 2 plasticizers used in medical devices and toys*, concluded that DEHP in medical devices is not harmful. In fact, it "imparts a variety of important physical characteristics that are critical to the function of medical devices. Eliminating DEHP in these products could cause harm to some individuals."

Under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, DEHP is classified as "unlikely to be carcinogenic to humans," although because of limitations in the database, classification as "possibly carcinogenic to humans" may also be appropriate.

The ACSH panel found fewer scientific reports (36) concerning DINP but concluded that it is not harmful for children in the "normal use of these toys." The panel did recommend further study to document children's contact time and mouthing behaviour involving toys and other objects, and the rates of release of DINP under realistic conditions. In November 1998, Health Canada advised parents to discard teethingers and rattles made of PVC and asked toy manufacturers to phase out the use of DINP.

The full ACSH panel report is available at www.medscape.com, and a summary of the HCWH report is online at www.noharm.org.