



## **AAPM Position Statement on Complementary and Alternative Medicine**

### **Summary**

Patients in pain commonly seek complementary or alternative treatment methods.<sup>1,2</sup> Because many patients do not tell their healthcare professionals about their use of these treatments, the potential for significant harm exists, especially from adverse interactions with other pharmacologic agents the patient is using. Pain specialists need to be educated about and aware of these methods, particularly about herbal medicine, and they need to ask their patients about their use of complementary methods at the initial evaluation. Pain specialists have a duty to stay informed and to inform patients of potentially harmful effects of these modalities.

### **Ethical Tenets**

The Current Opinions in the AMA's *Code of Medical Ethics* caution that "it is unethical to engage in or to aid and abet in treatment which has no scientific basis and is dangerous, is calculated to deceive the patient by giving false hope, or which may cause the patient to delay in seeking proper care."<sup>3</sup>

Many chronic pain patients will see multiple healthcare professionals in an effort to get pain relief. In the course of taking the patient's history and reviewing the records, pain specialists may come across treatment and care that seem to be significantly below the standard of care or that may appear to be incompetently administered or even to be harmful to the patient. The AMA's *Code of Medical Ethics* unequivocally states, "A physician should expose, without fear or loss of favor, incompetent or corrupt, dishonest, or unethical conduct on the part of members of the profession."<sup>4</sup>

### **Recommendations**

It is strongly recommended that incompetent or unethical professionals undergo corrective action such as mandatory education and/or peer counseling. This aim is best accomplished if concerns are reported through appropriate channels, such as state medical societies, peer review organizations, or licensing boards.

Pain Medicine is a relatively new field of specialization that is evolving in tandem with pharmacologic and procedural advances that mandate continuing medical education (CME). While there may be mandatory, state-regulated CME requirements for continued licensure, "fulfillment of mandatory state CME requirements does not necessarily fulfill the physician's ethical obligation to maintain his or her medical expertise."<sup>5</sup>

Maintaining professional expertise is particularly important for pain specialists because research indicates that an alarming amount of misinformation and potentially harmful attitudes concerning pain exist among other healthcare professionals, adversely affecting patient care.<sup>6</sup>

## References

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3. Code of Medical Ethics, Current Opinions with Annotations, 2004-2005 ed. (hereafter cited as *Code of Medical Ethics*). Chicago: American Medical Association; 2004. Opinions on Interprofessional Relations, sec 3.00:102.
4. *Code of Medical Ethics*, Opinions on Professional Rights and Responsibilities, sec 9.04:264.
5. Code of Medical Ethics, Opinions on Professional Rights and Responsibilities, sec 9.011:253.
6. Lebovits AH, Florence I, Bathina R, Hunko V, Fox MT, Bramble CY. Pain knowledge and attitudes of health care professionals: practice characteristic differences. *Clin J Pain.* 1997;13:237-243.

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Reviewed March 2011