



# Day In Day Out

WELCOA'S ONLINE BULLETIN FOR YOUR LIFESTYLE

## Things to Know When Selecting a Complementary Health Practitioner



If you're looking for a complementary health practitioner to help treat a medical problem, it is important to be as careful and thorough in your search as you are when looking for conventional care.

Here are some tips to help you in your search:

- › **If you need names of practitioners in your area, first check with your doctor or other health care provider.** A nearby hospital or medical school, professional organizations, state regulatory agencies or licensing boards, or even your health insurance provider may be helpful.
- › **Find out as much as you can about any potential practitioner, including education, training, licensing, and certifications.** The credentials required for complementary health practitioners vary tremendously from state to state and from discipline to discipline.

Once you have found a possible practitioner, here are some tips about deciding whether he or she is right for you:

- › **Find out whether the practitioner is willing to work together with your conventional health care providers.** For safe, coordinated care, it's important for all of the professionals involved in your health to communicate and cooperate.
- › **Explain all of your health conditions to the practitioner, and find out about the practitioner's training and experience in working with people who have your conditions.** Choose a practitioner who understands how to work with people with your specific needs, even if general well-being is your goal. And, remember that health conditions can affect the safety of complementary approaches; for example, if you have glaucoma, some yoga poses may not be safe for you.

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- **Don't assume that your health insurance will cover the practitioner's services.** Contact your health insurance provider and ask. Insurance plans differ greatly in what complementary health approaches they cover, and even if they cover a particular approach, restrictions may apply.
- **Tell all your health care providers about all complementary approaches you use and about all practitioners who are treating you.** Keeping your health care providers fully informed helps you to stay in control and effectively manage your health.

## A Word on Credentials

Health care providers' credentials—the licenses, certificates, and diplomas on their office walls—tell us about their professional qualifications to advise and treat us. In the United States, local and state governments and professional organizations establish the credentials that complementary health practitioners need to treat patients. Here are some key points to keep in mind:

- There is no standardized, national system for credentialing complementary health practitioners. State and local governments are responsible for deciding what credentials practitioners must have to work in their jurisdiction.
- The credentials required for complementary health practitioners vary tremendously from state to state and from discipline to discipline.
- Regulations, licenses, or certificates do not guarantee safe, effective treatment from any provider—conventional or complementary.
- Tell all your health care providers about any complementary health approaches you use. Give them a full picture of what you do to manage your health. This will help ensure coordinated and safe care.

Remember that regulations, licenses, or certificates do not guarantee safe, effective treatment from any provider, whether conventional or complementary.