



COMPLEMENTARY & ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES POLICY

The College of Nurses, Aotearoa (NZ) Inc is supportive of appropriately qualified Registered Nurses and Nurse Practitioners using complementary and alternative therapies as part of their overall nursing practice.

Definition

As complementary and alternative therapies is a widely used term with no commonly accepted definition, the College of Nurses Aotearoa has adopted definitions used by the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Complementary and Alternative Health (MACCAH) and the World Health Organisation.

The Ministerial Advisory Committee on Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM)¹ definition is:

Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) is a broad domain of healing resources that encompasses all health systems, modalities, and practices and their accompanying theories and beliefs, other than those intrinsic to the politically dominant health system of a society or culture in a given historical period. CAM includes all such practices and ideas self-defined by their users as preventing or treating illness or promoting health and well-being.

And the World Health Organisation² defines it as follows:

The terms "complementary medicine" and "alternative medicine" refer to a broad set of health care practices that are not part of that country's own traditional or conventional medicine and are not fully integrated into the dominant health care system. Other terms sometimes used to describe these health care practices include 'natural medicine', 'non-conventional medicine' and 'holistic medicine'.

Conditions for Nurses Using Complementary and Alternative Therapies

Supporting Registered Nurses' & Nurse Practitioners use of complementary therapies as part of their nursing practice is subject to the following conditions:

1. Nurses who choose to use complementary therapies as part of their practice are responsible for ensuring this is provided within an appropriate nursing framework.
2. The nurse holds a current recognized qualification relevant to the complementary therapy they are using and participates in relevant professional development to ensure their ongoing competency.
3. Complementary and alternative therapies used should have a reasonable basis in evidence regarding efficacy and minimal risks for the client.
4. Clients have made an informed choice about their treatment options and have given their informed consent.

¹ Ministerial Advisory Committee (2004) Complementary and Alternative Health Care in New Zealand: Advice to the Minister of Health. ISBN 0-478-28288-5 (web).

² World Health Organisation (2019) WHO Global Report on Traditional and Complementary Medicine. ISBN 978-92-4-151543-6 (web).

5. The informed consent process must include explanation of the treatment, including any benefits, risks, possible side effects and / or interactions with other remedies, medications or treatments the client is currently undergoing. It should also explain the difference between complimentary therapies and conventional health care and treatments, so the client understands and is clear about the different approaches to treatment when making decisions about their care.
6. The use of complementary and alternative therapies is done so in a manner that is consistent with the nurses professional, legal and ethical obligations.
7. The nurse undertakes a comprehensive nursing and health assessment as a baseline for intervention and any on-going treatment, including identification of any underlying health problem/s and/or contraindications prior to administering any complementary therapy.
8. If medical or other intervention is indicated this must be discussed with the client and subject to client's agreement, a referral is made to an appropriately qualified practitioner.
9. Collaboration with other health professionals involved in the care of the client should be undertaken, where indicated. However, a client who can provide informed consent can exercise his / her right to choose.
10. All assessments, decisions (nurse or clients) and advice must be comprehensively documented, especially where the nurse has advised the client of the need for referral, or NOT to avoid medical investigations and / or treatment in favor of complementary treatment.

Caring for patients who are using Complementary and Alternative Therapies

1. Some complementary and alternative therapies can adversely impact on conventional care. Therefore, even if the nurse does not intend to use or recommend these therapies, all nurses should be aware of them and the potential implications they may have on a client's overall nursing and treatment plan.
2. Where appropriate nurses should document any complimentary and alternative therapies a client is using, so that this information can be considered as part of the patient's plan of care.
3. Nurses should acknowledge that complementary and alternative therapies may be practiced by clients within a specific cultural context and these should be respected and considered when planning and providing nursing care.

Related resources

- New Zealand Nursing Council *Code of Conduct for Nurses*
- The New Zealand Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights
- The Health Information Privacy Code 1994
- Ministry of Health: Rongoā Māori Traditional Māori healing
- Guideline on the Regulation of Therapeutic Products in New Zealand (2014) *N.B Currently under review*

At the time of writing (September 2019), this policy is reflective of relevant legislative and regulatory New Zealand standards. Any legislative or regulatory changes made which may affect the relevance of this policy before this document is next reviewed must be adhered to. The contents of this policy supersede any earlier versions of the policy.