HPNA Position Statement
Integrative Therapies in Palliative Nursing Practice

The Hospice and Palliative Nurses Association (HPNF) is committed to a comprehensive model of care that addresses physical, emotional, and spiritual concerns of patients at the end of life using integrative health approaches. It is the position of HPNA that:

- The use of integrative health approaches is gaining popularity, and this trend has important implications for nursing practice, education, and research.
- Cultural diversity has an important impact on integrative health approaches in the United States.
- Many integrative health approaches provide a holistic way to manage symptoms and promote wellness at the end of life, which is consistent with nursing’s historical and philosophical methods of practice.
- Integrative health approaches play a role in improving symptoms and enhancing quality of life for patients with serious or life-threatening illnesses.
- Hospice and palliative nurses must have sufficient access to resources about these therapies to guide patients in making informed decisions regarding their care (e.g., benefits, burdens) and to incorporate these therapies into a comprehensive plan of care.
- There is a lack of research regarding integrative health approaches in children. Hospice and palliative nurses must discuss potential implementation with children’s healthcare providers.
- Basic and continuing nursing education that focuses on integrative health approaches for patients with serious or life-threatening illnesses should be implemented into a nursing course of study.
- Healthcare providers should support and encourage the competent practice of integrative health approaches for promoting holistic end-of-life care.
- Some integrative health approaches are within the scope of nursing practice and should be employed when appropriate.
- The nursing profession needs regulatory and legislative clarification regarding the scope of nursing practice as it relates to integrative health approaches.
- Safe, rigorous, and ethically sound research needs to be conducted to examine the efficacy, cost, and adverse effects of integrative health approaches.
- Nurses must be educated regarding state and federal regulations on integrative health approaches.
- Licensed and/or certified therapists should be used to deliver integrative health approaches.
**Background**

The goals of integrative therapies in professional nursing practice and palliative care aim to reduce suffering and enhance patient comfort, promoting dimensions of healing in the face of serious or life-threatening illnesses.

The Bernard Osher Foundation funded a project including a group of six international academic resource centers to study, teach, and practice integrative medicine. The Osher Collaborative defines a broader definition of integrative medicine and is described as follows\(^1\):

- Reaffirms the importance of the relationship between practitioner and patient, focuses on the whole person, is informed by evidence, and makes use of appropriate therapeutic approaches, healthcare professionals, and professions to achieve optimal health and healing.
- Applies rigorous scientific research methods to evaluate physiological and therapeutic mechanisms, efficacy, and use of approaches in society as they affect health, resiliency, and well-being.
- Educates practitioners, public, and policy to appreciate and address the full range of physical, emotional, mental, social, spiritual, and environmental influences that affect health.

An integrative nursing plan for a patient dealing with serious illness includes capturing the individual patient’s view of the illness, health goals, and understanding of the person’s current social, spiritual, emotional, and environmental aspects of well-being.\(^1\) Integrative health incorporates complementary approaches into mainstream health care.\(^1\) Complementary and alternative health approaches consist of non-mainstream medical practices and products being used in place of conventional medicine.\(^1\)

Complementary and alternative medicines have been practiced for centuries. Ancient philosophers such as Hippocrates, Plato, and Aristotle referred to the use and efficacy of what is now regarded as complementary therapy.\(^2\) The use of complementary therapies in nursing practice dates to Florence Nightingale, the founder of secular nursing. She described the use of therapies such as aromatherapy, heat and cold, distraction, and nutrition in the holistic care of patients.\(^3\)

As people live longer with chronic diseases and look for new ways to improve their quality of life, the use of integrative health approaches in the United States continues to rise.\(^4\) According to a 2007 National Health Interview Survey (updated in 2015) conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC’s) National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), the U.S. public spent $33.9 billion out of pocket on complementary health approaches over a 12-month period. The data include 38.2% of adults and 12% of children using one or more complementary health approach.\(^5,6\) Complementary health approaches accounted for approximately 1.5% of total healthcare expenditures and 11.2% of total out-of-pocket expenditures by Americans.\(^5,6\) Complementary and alternative medicine services in the United
States are an approximately $9 billion market each year, equal to 3 percent of national ambulatory healthcare expenditures. Those costs have essentially stabilized. As a result of the increasing popularity of integrative health approaches to treat chronic illnesses, hospice and palliative care providers must be informed and educated about the types of therapies available, associated costs, interactions, risks, and benefits for patients, and they should include this information as part of comprehensive professional nursing assessment. A 2007 National Home and Hospice Care Survey conducted by the CDC’s NCHS identified that 41.8% of hospices offered complementary health approaches through direct staff or contracted providers.

Because the field is broad and constantly changing, there are many definitions associated with complementary therapy. The definition of a “complementary health approach” by the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH) is “a non-mainstream practice ... used together with conventional medicine.” The NCCIH also divides complementary health approaches into two subgroups: natural products and mind and body practices (Table 1).

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<tr>
<th>Natural Products</th>
<th>Mind and Body Practices</th>
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<td>Echinacea</td>
<td>Acupuncture/acupressure</td>
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<td>Fish oil/omega-3 fatty acids</td>
<td>Aromatherapy</td>
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<td>Herbs/botanicals</td>
<td>Art therapy</td>
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<td>Minerals</td>
<td>Chiropractic/osteopathic manipulations</td>
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<td>Probiotics</td>
<td>Deep breathing/relaxation techniques</td>
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<td>Vitamins</td>
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<td>Yoga/Pilates/movement therapies</td>
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Complementary health approaches are recognized as an aspect of the integrative nature of professional nursing practice. For this reason, it is important that nurses are educated on the safe use and efficacy of complementary health approaches. Most state boards of nursing now recognize the close relationship between complementary therapies and nursing and are thus able to identify what is within the scope of nursing practice to define the required education and competencies.
Nurses can incorporate useful complementary health approaches, provided by licensed and/or certified therapists, into a patient’s comprehensive plan of care. Complementary health approaches often have an additive effect to traditional therapy. Of note, patients with a high symptom burden may benefit from the inclusion of complementary health approaches.⁹,¹¹

Nursing care for those with serious or life-threatening illnesses has long embraced the individual, encompassing the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of care.⁴ Therefore, nursing is a natural fit for the use of complementary therapies. When complementary health approaches are used in nursing and integrated into patient care, they should be documented within the scope of professional nursing practice and identified as nursing interventions to address specific concerns. The role of the professional nurse in complementary health approaches is important for positive patient outcomes.

Although there is a lack of high-level empirical evidence supporting complementary health approaches, anecdotal reports indicate that professional nurses who use these modalities find that patients experience an increased level of comfort and well-being after receiving these types of therapy.¹⁰,¹¹

Complementary health approaches cannot be considered risk-free, as there can be interactions between complementary health approaches and standard medical treatments. For example, ginkgo biloba has anticoagulant effects and can increase the risk of hemorrhage when used with blood thinners such as warfarin.¹⁶ St. John's wort can decrease the effectiveness of some antiretrovirals, antihypertension medications, and antidepressants.¹⁶

Physical mind and body practices can also result in injury if not done properly or when performed by people with balance and weakness difficulties. For example, injuries with yoga (e.g., musculoskeletal, nervous, visual) are rare, but the risk increases in those with glaucoma or musculoskeletal conditions and those taking sedating or psychoactive drugs.¹⁵ Yoga and tai chi can cause muscle aches and pain. It is important to incorporate this information into patient education so that people are aware of that potential.¹⁵

**Definition of Terms**

**Alternative therapies:** a non-mainstream approach used in place of conventional medical and surgical therapies⁴

**Complementary health approaches:** practices and products of non-mainstream origin⁴

**Holistic nursing practice:** a “nursing practice that has healing the whole person as its goal.” Holistic nursing “draws on nursing knowledge, theories, expertise, and intuition to guide nurses in becoming therapeutic partners with people in their care. This practice recognizes the totality of the human being—the interconnectedness of body, mind, emotion, spirit, social/cultural, relationship, context, and environment.”¹⁷
Integrative health approaches: incorporating complementary approaches into mainstream health care

References


This position statement reflects the bioethics standards or best available clinical evidence at the time of writing or revisions. This position statement is based on evidence that reflects patients with advanced illness and may not be applicable in all palliative circumstances.

Approved by the HPNA Board of Directors Month Year

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