

CHAPTER XI: Overview of NCCAM

Public Response to CAM Research

Ok, so that's where we were in 2002, and here's the latest data. Now, we interpret this very cautiously, as suggesting that the research impacts on public use. Echinacea sales fell very promptly after the publication of the Echinacea studies. The supplement industry also tracks the impact of this research on public use, and they certainly agree that the extents of media coverage of these studies does result in impact on sales. This is actually from the Nutrition Business Journal. That's the journal that is the trade journal of the dietary supplement and over-the-counter industry. And what you see here is that they notice that the main Echinacea study was published in July 2005. They say it's lucky it was published in the summer when fewer people had colds, and they noticed substantially lower sales the following winter. So we believe that the public investment in this is yielding information that's important. We are always disappointed when studies don't show the expected benefit, but we think definitive rigorous answers to these questions are really important. And this is just to emphasize the fact that this research gets enormous media coverage. The public and the media are very interested in this research, more, I think, than some of the other areas to research the NIH supports. And one of the reasons people are interested in this, is these are self-care decisions, so these aren't decisions where people returning to their docs for the answer. These are things they're struggling with themselves.

So the numbers tell us that these practices (particularly natural products, meditation, massage, manipulative therapies, yoga, widely used in the American public) chronic pain, especially back pain, is the most common reason. Media coverage, public interest is very strong. And data on natural products from both our sources and industry sources, indicates there is public impact on research results. So, in spite of that, lots of people in the medical profession are not totally convinced that it's worth spending money on. Certainly one of the reasons they're not, they say, "well none of it works." But I actually think some of these health practices are important and show promise and are interesting. I come to this with the perspective of being a kidney doctor and having taken care of real sick people, surrounded with high-tech medicine and I know how demoralizing and difficult that is for our patients, and have seen, as I talk to people, incorporating these approaches into their practice, how much lots of testimonials of the meeting needs, that are not well-met by our current healthcare system. And so that's why I take very seriously trying to identify those practices that really have the biggest potential, to help people either suffering with chronic disease, or trying to stay healthy.