

## COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINES (CAMs) IN PSYCHIATRY: THE OPINION OF MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

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**Background:** In a demographic survey in 2005, 13.6% of Italians admitted to have taken CAMs during the 3 years before. A study on hospitalized patients for psychiatric reasons highlighted that 63% of them used CAM in the previous year and 79% did not mention this to their psychiatrists.

**Objective:** To collect the opinions about the use of CAMs in psychiatry among a group of psychiatrists and nurses working in a Mental Health Centre.

**Aim:** To investigate knowledge, opinions and experiences on CAMs.

**Methods:** A mixed qualitative-quantitative method was used: 2 focus groups were conducted in June 2011, involving 12 professionals of one Mental Health Community Centre in Modena, Italy. The audio-recordings of the focus groups were analyzed by 2 researchers, who identified the main themes with an inductive method. The participants were finally asked to fill in a respondent validation questionnaire.

**Results:** Four main themes were developed:

- 1) advantages, and
- 2) disadvantages in the use of CAMs,
- 3) patients' and own experiences,
- 4) variety of therapies under the CAM acronym.

Among the pros, 75% of respondents agreed that CAMs allow a better global approach to the patient, 58% that CAMs may improve quality of life, 66% that conventional psychiatric therapies do not solve every situation. As to disadvantages, some professionals (medical doctors) expressed skepticism on CAMs.

**Conclusions:** Being realistic, open-minded and ready to listen and cooperate: this could be the best attitude towards patients who take CAMs.