Concerns which affect the CAM relation-ship, which is essentially subjective, holistic and intuitive, are very dif-
f erent from those arising in an orthodox relationship which is, char-
cacteristically objective, symptom-
based and rational. When considering benefi cence, for example, “healing” in
the CAM sense takes on a much broader defi nition, referring to im-
provements which can occur on an emotional, psychological or spiritual
level, without the patient necessarily being cured of specifi c disease symp-
toms.

Alternative Medicine and Ethics

is certainly a useful starting point for
debate. This multi-authored text in-
cludes thought-provoking chapters on orthodox practitioners as gatekeepers
to CAM, insurance coverage for CAM, and ethical and legal dilemmas
surrounding prayer as a method of
alternative healing for children. Al-
though written from an American
perspective, the issues are extremely
pertinent in the UK, where a major
initiative, established by HRH The
Prince of Wales, is currently looking
at the whole area of integration of CAM
and orthodox medicine.

Ever since the passing of the
Quacks’ Charter of 1542, the status of
complementary medicine has been the
subject of sustained political debate.
Indeed, what has linked over 150
diverse therapeutic approaches in
the past is their exclusion from what
has been taught in orthodox medical
schools, and the unwillingness of
insurers to pay for them. Even the
choice of nomenclature – “comple-
mentary” or “alternative” – represents
the divide as to whether therapists see
themselves as supplementary to ortho-
dox medicine or as a genuine alterna-
tive, and it is interesting that this book
chooses the latter term, whereas in
the UK the preferred term is “comple-
mentary”, and increasingly, we read of
“integrated medicine”.

Those alternative practitioners who
regard the medical profession’s antipa-
thy towards CAM as having more to
do with medical territorialism and less
to do with the best interests of patients
will fi nd no comfort in the book’s
forthright opening chapter: “Alterna-
tive medicine: more hype than hope”.
In fact, this tirade by Stephen Barrett
is almost comical in its one-sidedness.
As though side effects and iatrogenic
illness did not exist, he writes: “With
safe and effective medicines available,
treatment with herbal products makes
little sense”. So much for promoting
patient choice!

Weitzman, in his chapter on insur-
ance coverage, by way of contrast,
takes as his starting point the much
quoted fi ndings from a 1993 survey
that nearly one in three of the popula-
tion in the US used some form or
other of CAM therapy, spending
$13.7 billion out of their own pockets
for services not covered by health
plans. Patel’s chapter, “Understanding
the integration of alternative modalities
into an emerging healthcare model
in the United States”, provides
a thoughtful analysis of what integra-
tion might mean in practice and what
might be lost by forcing CAM ther-
apies, which traditionally offer a com-
passionate, caring and humane ap-
proach, into the environs of orthodox
medicine. In doing so, he poses critical
questions about how the Cartesian/
Newtonian biomedical model can be
reconciled with the mind-body phi-
losophies underpinning CAM thera-
pies.

The chapters on health plans as
gatekeepers and insurance coverage
for alternative medicine may need
some translation for a UK readership,
but the central issues are the same on
both sides of the Atlantic, namely the
reluctance to integrate or fund CAM
therapies which are not substantiated
by scientifi c research at a time when
orthodox medicine is being increas-
ingly driven in an evidence-based
direction. Again, although drawing
entirely on US case law, Neeley’s
chapter on “Prayer as a method of
alternative healing” raises fundamen-
tal issues about parental rights of
decision making, and whether it can
ever be right to abandon orthodox
medicine in favour of CAM
approaches for one’s children, a ques-
tion which is yet to reach the British
courts.

This is a fascinating book which
deserves a wide readership. As well as
its obvious interest to complementary
and alternative therapists, it raises
important general issues of health care
ethics and law. It should certainly be
read by general practitioner and health
authority purchasers who may be
interested in purchasing CAM thera-
pies, and will, it is to be hoped, be
taken up by the growing number of
medical schools offering special study
modules in this subject.

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Alternative Medicine and Ethics

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Robert P Almeder, Humana Press,
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Despite the growing popularity of
complementary and alternative
(CAM) therapies both in the UK and
the US, surprisingly little has been
written about the ethical dimensions
of the holistic CAM relationship. Such
literature as there is often transposes
the discourse of medical ethics to the
CAM relationship mutatis mutandis,
overlooking the substantial differences
between the nature of the professional
relationships. Arguably, the ethical

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