

Title of Paper: What makes complementary medicine "alternative"?

Author(s): Ozyilmaz, N¹, Wallace, D² and Waller, Simon³

Institution: Department of Paediatric Nephrology, Evelina Children's Hospital, Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1 7EH

Abstract:

Objective: To discuss possible predictors of complimentary and alternative medicine (CAM) use and its impact on conventional medicine

Case: AE, a 4 year-old boy diagnosed with Nephrotic Syndrome at the age of 2,5 years. He was commenced on high dose Prednisalone and achieved remission within a week. Subsequently, he had further relapses and therefore commenced on Levamisole although he responded to steroids promptly on each occasion.

On his fourth relapse, he was re-commenced on high dose steroids as per protocol. The family went on holiday since he was clinically stable. When the family returned to the UK, the child was found to have a significant ascites with marked generalized oedema. Upon inquiring further, father, who is a qualified pharmacist in India and training in CAM stated that he had been seeking herbal therapy for his son whilst intentionally administering Prednisalone alternate daily since he was concerned about the side effects of the steroids. As a consequence, the child failed to achieve remission and clinically became unwell. In view of lack of evidence as well as concerns as regards to the safety and efficacy, he was advised against herbal treatments. Following addressing parent's concerns, the child was started on high dose daily steroids. He achieved remission within a week.

Discussion: There is no universally agreed definition of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). These medicines and treatments range from acupuncture and homeopathy to aromatherapy, meditation and colonic irrigation. An increasing number of people use CAM, which has an impact on conventional medical practice and patient's safety. However, the motivations for such use are, at present, poorly understood. The authors believe that doctors need to understand the sociocultural and personal factors underlying a parent's decision to use alternative therapies and be informed about potential benefits and limitations of CAM in order to provide appropriate advice that may generate patient satisfaction and compliance.

Name of presenting Author(s): D Wallace

Profession of presenting Author (s): Senior Clinical Fellow¹, SpR in Paediatric Nephrology², Consultant Paediatric Nephrologist³