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ONTARIO MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

Complementary & Integrative Medicine Medical Interest Group

CIM-MIG

Summer 2023

Our Mission

Our mission is to support physicians, residents, and medical students who have an interest in complementary and integrative medicine (CIM) therapies. We will do this by sharing information, news and events, by providing recommendations for safe, responsible and professional practice, and by communicating with stakeholders about

CIM as a valuable tool that can help Ontario's doctors deliver better healthcare.

Our Vision

Our vision is an inclusive healthcare system in Ontario, in which patients can explore their interest in complementary and integrative medicine with doctors, to ensure their safety and support their efforts to achieve better health outcomes.



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Message from the Chair



Hello CIM MIG members. Thank you to those who replied to the General Meeting email. Based on the response we will schedule a virtual networking and information meeting instead. We will send out an update about a date and time in November over the next couple of months.

This summer newsletter includes an article by Dr. Richard Nahas on the challenge of Regulatory Fairness for Integrative Physicians and suggests some viable solutions to improve the oversight of our practices. Dr. Adrienne Junek has written an informative article addressing therapies for dealing with our patients' (and perhaps our own) emotional trauma. I have written an article on a comprehensive approach to revamping our broken healthcare system which has been spearheaded by the VA in the U.S.A. (which similar to Canada delivers universal health care to its veterans.)

Your executive committee and I would like to take this opportunity to extend our best wishes for a happy and healthy summer.

Conferences & Events

[George Washington University Medicinal Fungi Virtual Conference](#)

ABOUT. On September 22, 2023, the GW Office of Integrative Medicine and Health (OIMH) will hold a day-long continuing education (CE) conference to explore innovative treatments using fungi. During the GW Medicinal Fungi Conference, the OIMH will bring leading researchers together to give talks and discuss the use of fungi for illness and to promote well-being including new treatments and what needs to be done to expand research in this area of study.

[Event Registration](#)

[Seventh Annual Integrative Health Symposium - Whole Person Health: Completing the Circle of Care](#)

ABOUT. This one-day virtual symposium will feature discussions of the whole person health model of care as it applies to children, adolescents, and those who care for them. Participants will learn the components of whole person health and how they impact health and wellness. Topics covered will include spirituality, nutrition and the microbiome, nature and the environment, mental health, and community interventions. Practical skills and tools to promote whole health for both the patient and the provider will be shared.

[Event Registration](#)

[2024 INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS AND MEMBERS MEETING](#)

ABOUT. The International Congress on Integrative Medicine and Health will take place at the Hilton Cleveland Downtown & Convention Center in Cleveland, Ohio, April 9 to April 13, 2024. The International Congress is convened by the Academic Consortium for Integrative Medicine and Health..

[Event Website](#)

Clinical Resources



Psychotherapy Adjuncts for Emotional Trauma

Low Mental health is influenced by our past experiences which shaped us to be the person we are today. Sometimes our past experiences include traumatic events that continue to affect our lives as adults; trauma that can be physical, sexual, emotional, or in other forms.

Memories of trauma are often pushed aside or boxed away to prevent them from affecting our everyday life, although in some cases, such as in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), this is not entirely possible. In PTSD, the brain & body become “wired” to associate memories of a previous trauma with physical stress response in the present moment. The stress responses then recur spontaneously in response to memory recall, or can be triggered by other ordinary life events.

Treatment of PTSD or emotional trauma typically consists of antidepressant medication and various forms of psychotherapy, including trauma focused psychotherapy, exposure desensitization, and various forms of cognitive reprocessing. While psychotherapy has been a mainstay for PTSD and other mental health conditions, it is sometimes difficult to speak about past trauma when our body is in a sympathetic dominant state, thus approaches to therapy that help to dissipate this high-alert state can be helpful. Below are some techniques that are being integrated into psychotherapy for trauma to help make progress when relying on talk therapy alone is not enough:

1. Mindfulness & Sensory Reprocessing / Somatic Re-experiencing

Grounding techniques such as mindfulness meditation, deep breathing techniques, and relaxation exercises can help keep a person focused on the present moment rather than slipping back into the memories of trauma in the past. Somatic re-experiencing helps re-train individuals to feel calm in their body through repeated practice exercises. These interventions can help to reduce sympathetic overdrive by training the activity of the vagus nerve to bring an increased sense of calm to the body, relax the muscles, breathe more slowly and increase heart rate variability. When a person is in a more relaxed state, all parts of therapy become easier.

2. Eye Movement Desensitization Response (EMDR) & Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT)

EMDR and EFT involve other interventions, be they eye movements/positioning or tapping at specific acupuncture points, to help a person achieve a state of calm. EMDR has been well studied in PTSD ([PMID 24338345](#)) as well as EFT ([PMID 36438382](#)), which has frequently been used as a strategy to treat PTSD in war veterans. Both of these tools are best accessed through a trained psychotherapist who can help guide patients through the most effective strategy to achieve a state of calm when we become hyper alert.

3. Substance guided psychotherapy

There has been a resurgence in the use of MDMA, psilocybin and ketamine lately - not just as recreational drugs, but as adjuncts to therapy. These substances can biochemically break through the barrier of physical distress signals to biochemically place an individual into a state of calm. While psilocybin and MDMA are still technically illegal, their use as a psychotherapy adjunct is increasingly becoming recognized for use in depression ([PMID 34942586](#)) and in PTSD ([PMID 34708874](#)). Ketamine in particular is more available as it can be prescribed, usually at low doses administered intramuscularly, to assist with anxiety and depression ([PMID 35734507](#)).

While some of the above techniques can be learned and/or accessed on your own, it is likely safer and more effective to work with a psychologist or psychotherapist trained in one of the above techniques. Therapy is an indispensable tool for nearly all mental health condition, yet in some cases it is not enough. When classic medications and therapy are insufficient to help control symptoms, consider whether incorporating one or more of the adjuncts above may be the right tool to help a patient who is stuck move forward.

By Dr. Adrienne Junek

Clinical Resources Continued...



An Alternative for Our Broken Health Care System

As the deficiencies in our health care system are laid bare for all of us on a daily basis, it is difficult to see the way forward for salvaging Canada's idealized but broken "universal" health care. Conventional medicine is a wonderful tool to be used when necessary. Unfortunately, the old adage "If all you have is a hammer, then everything looks like a nail" applies to the overuse and misuse of sometimes harsh and invasive conventional approaches. Many of us who practice Integrative Medicine share common values when envisioning a new form of health care focused on lifestyle and preventative medicine as well as supporting our patients to return to health and wholeness through expanded approaches that are gentler and promote healing.

Health care, especially in regards to its present state, necessarily needs to be reimagined. Enter the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine in the U.S. which focused on the Veterans Affairs' (VA) medical system and studied what the deficiencies in the overall system were and how to remedy them. The VA delivers a model of universal health care to their veterans arguably in a farther reaching and more comprehensive manner than Canada's Universal health care model. The National Academy of Medicine's (NAM) committee was charged "to provide guidance on how to fill gaps and create processes to accelerate the transformation to whole health care for veterans, both inside and outside the VA system, and the rest of the U.S. population." Whole health is defined as physical, behavioral, spiritual, and socioeconomic well-being as defined by individuals, families, and communities.

The NAM committee created a report which "presents findings and recommendations that provide a roadmap for improving health and well-being for veterans and the nation." The report sets out to define whole health and the evidence supporting it in practice. It then creates a template for scaling and spreading it throughout health systems as well as the infrastructures necessary to implement it. For the full report, click [here](#).

Although this report is U.S. centric, due to the nature of the VA's similarities to Canada's Universal Health Care, this report and recommendations could arguably be adapted in Canada as well. Complementary and Integrative Health (CIH) is also included in this report as an integral part of whole health. The report cites evidence for the efficacy of many aspects of CIH. Below is an excerpt with some useful references:

Complementary and Integrative Health

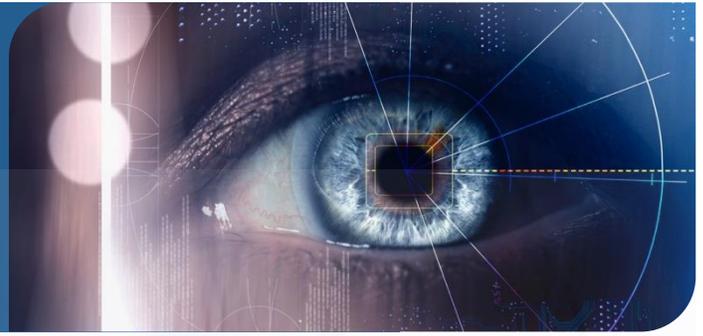
Research has shown that complementary and integrative health (CIH), which includes acupuncture, massage, yoga, wellness coaching, and meditation, can improve health outcomes for a number of health conditions (Armstrong et al., 2018; Gannotta et al., 2018; Scherwitz et al., 2003). CIH is particularly effective in treating chronic pain, one of the most common reasons for medical visits in the United States (Clarke et al., 2016). CIH approaches are increasingly used as part of cancer care (Armstrong et al., 2018), as reflected in the new field of integrative oncology (Greenlee et al., 2014). Similarly, research has shown that spiritual care is effective in helping individuals deal with pain (Brady et al., 1999), speeding recovery from illness and surgery (Casar Harris et al., 1995), improving end-of-life care (Lo et al., 1999), increasing patient satisfaction (Astrow et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2011), improving mental health (Dein et al., 2010; Koenig et al., 2015; Koenig et al., 2012; Pour Ashouri et al., 2016), and providing better overall health (Hall et al., 2019; Koenig, 2012).

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2023. Achieving Whole Health: A New Approach for Veterans and the Nation. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/26854>

I encourage you to share this report widely, especially if you are connected in some way to Canadian policy makers. Let's create a new conversation of possibilities!

By Dr. Esther Konigsberg

Clinical Resources Continued...



Regulatory Fairness - More Important Now Than Ever

As I write this, ChatGPT is transforming the entirety of human knowledge, and this will certainly include the profession of medicine. This tool, and others like it, will challenge many institutions and some will struggle to function in the age of AI. Whether it comes from humans, malicious bots or AI algorithms, misinformation and disinformation are becoming more and more common and are increasingly difficult to discern from reality. One impact of this historic shift will be to make real experts more relevant, and more necessary. Integrative MDs are experts in a field that is filled with controversy, and the value of their expertise should inform any discussion about appropriate regulation.

In recent years, a constantly evolving healthcare emergency has led patients to question facts and seek their own answers. While this self-directed approach can certainly lead to better outcomes, concern about the risk it may carry are not unfounded. It is important that these patients have access to knowledgeable, experienced medical professionals who can help them make more informed decisions. Our clinical experience can often make their journey safer and more effective. The ethical and scientific principles that underpin our professional culture and our medical education make us valuable partners for patients who need impartial and informed advice, and we recognize our duty to treat our fellow humans with integrity and respect when they are at their most vulnerable.

Physicians who practice complementary and integrative medicine have been scrutinized more closely than their conventional peers due to the nature of the unconventional therapies used as well as the various grades of evidence applied to such therapies. The greater level of scrutiny is understandable, but has had serious consequences. Doctors may feel more hesitant to recommend interventions that are perceived as 'alternative', 'complementary', 'integrative', or 'off-label' due to the fear of regulatory risk. Our surveys have confirmed this, with members identifying regulatory fairness as their top concern.

The COVID pandemic has politicized science in general, and has inflamed any discussion around controversial subjects, including integrative medicine in general.

Unfortunately, there are many members of our profession who dismiss Complementary and Integrative Medicine and its modalities as unscientific and misguided, not being aware of the breadth of evidence in the field.

It is widely accepted that doctors and other professions should regulate themselves. In Ontario, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario has established several committees to ensure that pediatricians, surgeons, psychiatrists and internists are evaluated by their peers. To be considered peers, they should have the knowledge and skill to evaluate the treatment provided. How can integrative MDs possibly expect a fair assessment of how well they do their job from people who are not informed and don't understand what they do?

The CPSO may be a single institution, but every committee is an institution unto itself. While increased scrutiny of integrative medicine is certainly appropriate, it is not fair for integrative MDs to be subject to decisions made by people who may hold negative beliefs about what they do. A large segment of the population values integrative healthcare, and regulatory fairness for integrative MDs is essential if we want to ensure that these patients have access to the kind of care they want for themselves and their loved ones.

The International Association of Medical Regulatory Authorities is a member-based organization that guides and aligns the practices of the CPSO and other regulators worldwide.

Clinical Resources Continued...



Frequent references on their website (<https://www.iamra.com/>) to misinformation and challenges created by the COVID pandemic make it clear that clinical practices that deviate from conventional approaches are under increased scrutiny at this time in history.

Your executive committee has been working on specific long-term initiatives with the potential to support more integrative healthcare in Ontario. Certification have been a key area of focus, and this is an important step towards greater confidence, validation and respect from our regulators and recognition from our peers. But perhaps of equal or more importance than this, in my humble opinion, is our need for an ICRC for integrative medicine.

Without a dedicated Inquiries, Complaints and Reports Committee (ICRC), whose members *understand and support integrative medicine*, very few doctors will be willing to accept the risk of deviating from guideline-based care for patients who want and need to explore other healthcare options. An integrative medicine ICRC would conduct more appropriate investigations, deliver more appropriate decisions, and would likely improve access to integrative healthcare.

I am a journal nerd, and a lot of my continuing education has come from reading the primary medical literature. My personal library includes over 5000 peer-reviewed articles that I have read, highlighted and annotated. This has informed my clinical experience with many integrative approaches, and when combined with the teaching, research and advocacy work I have done over the past 20 years, it makes me an expert in the field. Many of our members have developed expertise in areas that lie outside their formal medical training, such as nutrition, meditation, functional medicine, herbal medicine or acupuncture.

We are experts in a confusing field of medicine, making us an important resource to our colleagues, to our patients and to our communities. Many of our patients struggle with multisystem disorders and chronic complaints, for whom conventional approaches are poorly tolerated or ineffective. With greater confidence in regulatory fairness, more doctors will feel safe providing integrative healthcare to patients who want or need it.

Patients want their doctors to help them navigate their options, and if we can do this, we are more likely to retain our privileged role as their most trusted providers. With greater regulatory fairness, integrative medicine can not only improve the health of Canadians, but it can strengthen the profession in the process.

By Dr. Richard Nahas

An invitation to members

Share something with us!

The Medical Interest Group for Complementary and Integrative Medicine has over 400 members. Some of you may feel passionate about one specific modality, whether it be nutrition, movement, mind-body practices, natural health products, manual therapy, or acupuncture. Perhaps you have an interest in a specific condition, or some aspect of functional medicine that you want to share with us. Some of you may have insights or personal experiences that have shaped your perspective on healthcare.

Whatever you want to contribute, we want to read it and share it with the Ontario Integrative MD community. We would love to receive submissions, whether they are in the form of a single paragraph or a full-length article, with references or without. Help us all to grow and learn together. Email submissions to: oma.cim.mig@gmail.com

Please Support Our Work- Pay Your Constituency Fees

Your CIM MIG Executive is focused on advocating for physicians who practice Complementary and Integrative Medicine. We are intent on gaining recognition for our field in Ontario and Canada. We need your support to help us continue our work and to help us create a safe regulatory environment for Ontario's doctors. We have made significant progress towards this goal, by engaging stakeholders, providing a consistent message about our members' aspirations and concerns, and drafting submissions that offer real solutions.

By paying your \$50 Constituency Fee, you will help ensure that our work can continue. We are working to support you, but we cannot do it unless you support us. Follow the instructions below to pay your dues:

Step 1: Log into the OMA

Step 2: Click on "[My Account](#)"

Step 3: Click on "Pay dues & fees"

Step 4: Click "Next Step" at the bottom of the page

Step 5: Click on "Complementary & Integrative Medicine Medical Interest Group"

Step 6: Click on "Next Step" at the bottom of the page

Step 7: Follow instructions on the page to finish the payment

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