

To which public health problems can CAM make important contributions and the biggest impact?

Qigong is not just a simple therapy for some diseases, but a complete recovery health system that can treat multiple chronic conditions at the same time. It is the most cost-effective healthcare method among alternative therapies. Self-initiated Qigong has unique value because it enables practitioners to take responsibility for their own health.

Research on the clinical applications of Qigong (pronounced, *chee gong*) surpasses any other energy medicine therapy. For example, 55% of the 3500 citations listed in the comprehensive Qigong & Energy Medicine Database™ relate to Qigong therapy. Among these citations are articles describing the multifaceted applications of medical Qigong(1;3). The cost-effectiveness of medical Qigong is dramatically illustrated by the research of Reuther and Aldridge.(2)

On-going studies of Qigong address some of society's concerns, includes improving:

1. Health and longevity (e.g., stress, high blood pressure)
2. Performance of students in schools
3. Outcomes in hospital and clinical settings
4. Productivity in office environments
5. Outcome for prisoners
6. Multiple chronic conditions (hypertension, diabetes, arthritis, lower back pain, degenerated disk disease, etc.)
7. Addiction treatment outcomes (4,5)
8. Complementary therapy in cancer treatment without side effects (6)

The above brief introduction indicates that Qigong is a cost-effective healthcare method with wide potential for benefiting society. Therefore, we believe that there is a strong basis for recommending that NCCAM provide appropriate funding for Qigong research.

Tremendous health benefits also would be derived from an understanding of how the mind affects immunity. Numerous studies have shown the correlation between mental state and illness. More funding for projects involving the use of Qigong to study psychoneuroimmunology are highly recommended since much of Qigong involves meditation, intention, breathing, and movement exercises designed specifically to enhance the human immune system.

According to the Department of Health and Human Services, 70% of disease is preventable (7,8) yet most people don't know how to do this. In fact, the DHHS report lists a number of recommendations, such as elimination of smoking, regular exercise, and proper diet. These can certainly help, however, the largest impact upon the delivery of health care in this century can be made by the adoption of Qigong's self-initiated health maintenance practices. Tens of millions of people practice Qigong every day in China. A large portion of the research done on Qigong has involved Tai Chi, a moving form of Qigong. Besides aiding prevention of disease, Qigong and Tai Chi have been proven to be effective with chronic conditions and

rehabilitation, stress reduction, increasing immunity, reducing muscular system tension, lowering blood pressure, easing arthritis, improving balance and flexibility, improving mental well-being, improving cardio-respiratory and musculo-skeletal function, reducing the risk of falls in seniors, and building strength (9).

To date, Tai Chi research has been carried out mainly with seniors. This should be extended to other age groups. Furthermore, “In the literature there is a dearth of bio-mechanical studies. Some characteristics of muscular activity and movement kinematics and kinetics during the performance of [Tai Chi] movements are understood, but how they help to improve movement capacity has not yet been explained. Solving this puzzle should provide a significant challenge to scientists of both medical and biomechanical disciplines (9)”.

In addition, large strides have been made researching and proving the benefits of the most well known form of energy medicine, acupuncture (10) yet most acupuncture research is done on particular illnesses or to provide targeted treatments. In order to have the greatest impact, people must be able to carry out their own self-initiated health care. Having research that proves the effectiveness of energy-based therapies would provide enormous health benefits.

Thus, we strongly recommend that NCCAM institute a Human Energy Project to fully characterize the human energetic system at its fundamental level. Such a project would be on the order of the Human Genome Project.

What should NCCAM's role be, if any, in enabling integration of CAM therapies into mainstream conventional medical care?

1. Funding of research into one or more of the above areas.
2. Providing database services to keep physicians and consumers updated on uses of CAM, including Qigong.
3. Funding more conferences and training sections for mainstream doctors to learn about CAM.
4. Offering special training grants for CAM practitioners to conduct high-quality clinical studies.
5. Increasing awareness of the benefits of self-initiated Qigong.

Qigong will have greater acceptance among CAM therapies as more information is developed to document its effectiveness. For example, agencies such as the National Council on the Aging are carrying out research by running pilot programs to convince themselves that alternative therapies are viable. Apparently, they are unaware that these therapies are already available. Qigong in particular has been used effectively for thousands of years, and the Qigong and Energy Medicine Database TM lists about 3500 documented references on the benefits of energy medicine [6].

It is interesting to note that no one doubts that yoga is good for you, and it is a current health fad. The main reason for yoga's widespread acceptance is that it is treated more as a western-style exercise than a true health modality. Qigong is less well known than yoga, and suffers even more from lack of visibility and understanding of its benefits that are much more highly

documented. Moreover, Qigong is easier to learn and practice, especially for older people. A challenge for NCCAM is to help awareness of Qigong therapy and to promote Qigong research.

How should NCCAM's research training and career development programs be designed to facilitate its research goals?

NCCAM's research and career development programs should encompass many different complementary and alternative therapies to present a broad base for applications to different health problems. The training and career programs should include medical specialists in different fields of medicine. In this way a spectrum of possibilities can be presented and judged on their merits.

What are the knowledge gaps, specific themes, content areas, and/or key audiences that outreach should focus on?

The outreach should support the following:

1. More funding for post-doc and pre-doc fellowship in CAM research
2. Granting career awards to those promising scholars in different areas of CAM research
3. Offering more Center grants (P30) to facilitate career development programs
4. Qigong education in schools. Start early on teaching such life skills such as stress reduction, conflict avoidance, and healthy living habits.
5. Qigong to improve the quality of life for prisoners.
6. Integrate Qigong in the hospital/clinical areas.
7. Integrate Qigong into daily fitness routines at the societal level. For more information see [7].
8. Introduce Qigong in the office environment to increase productivity and reduce stress.

Non-profit organizations such as the Qigong Institute that are dedicated to Qigong research and education act as a liaisons between Qigong practitioners and research scientists via publications, focus meetings, seminars, development of multi-media presentations and demonstrations, etc.

Researchers, scientists and medical specialists presently have limited access to the most Qigong research information. NCCAM can work together with the Qigong Institute to expand the collection and distribution of the Qigong & Energy Medicine Database™. There is a great need to promote the benefit of Qigong for general health, particularly in the areas where no solutions are available right now. One example is stress management. The Qigong Institute can edit and distribute short instruction DVD/CD for general public on NCCAM's behalf.

Comments

The Qigong Institute strongly recommends that NCCAM include Qigong research in its next five-year strategic plan. Qigong is an ancient Chinese health modality that has demonstrated benefits for a variety of health and disease conditions [1]. Qigong can have an enormous impact in each of the four strategic planning areas as discussed above.

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