Complementary and Alternative Medicine in Rural Communities: Current Research and Future Directions

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Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) now forms a significant part of the healthcare system in most developed countries. Moreover, CAM use seems to be higher in rural communities when compared to urban areas. Not only do rural patients use more CAM but rural CAM practitioners also appear to have a greater primary care role in rural communities than their urban counterparts. Although lowered access to conventional services has traditionally been viewed as a possible explanatory factor for this higher use, recent data suggests that high CAM use is unrelated to levels of conventional care provision. Instead, high CAM use in rural communities seems related to a variety of unique complex cultural and social drivers. Exploring these drivers may help to facilitate more culturally relevant care and increase the impact of health services in rural communities.

Jon Wardle is a National Health and Medical Research Scholar at the School of Population Health at the University of Queensland. Jon is a practising naturopath and has obtained his Master of Public Health from the University of Queensland where he explored the role of naturopaths in rural Australia. In 2010 he was a Trans-Pacific Fellow at the School of Medicine at the University of Washington where he explored the impact of the rise of complementary medicine on rural family practice. He is currently completing his PhD in Public Health exploring the interface between complementary medicine and rural primary care. Jon is a Director of the Network of Researchers in the Public Health of Complementary and Alternative Medicine.