
Because health insurers are beginning to discover that nontraditional or alternative therapies save money [1], consumers are spending their dollars seeking alternative therapies [2], and conventionally trained U.S. physicians are incorporating alternative medical modalities into their everyday practice [3], it is inevitable that medical school and hospital libraries will be collecting more resources on alternative medicine. James Marti is the executive director of the Holistic Medical Research Foundation. His forward to The Alternative Health & Medicine Encyclopedia describes the above changes as a new direction for medicine: "While the old medical paradigm viewed the body basically as a machine, the new paradigm focuses on the interconnectedness of body, mind, emotions, social factors, and the environment in determining health status. Rather than relying on drugs and surgery, the new model utilizes natural, noninvasive techniques to promote health and healing” (p. xi).

The goal of The Alternative Health & Medicine Encyclopedia is to acquaint consumers and health practitioners with the major components of alternative health and medicine. The book is divided into twenty chapters. Chapter 1 provides an overview of numerous healing systems, such as acupuncture, ayurvedic medicine, chiropractic medicine, homeopathy, meditation, and yoga. Chapters 2 through 8 discuss maintaining health through nutrition, vitamins, minerals and trace elements, botanical medicines, exercise, strengthening the immune system, and coping with stress. Chapters 9 through 19 cover alternative therapies for specific disorders, which include stress-related disorders; drug abuse and addiction; mental health disorders; common male health problems; common female health problems; pregnancy, childbirth, and infant care; dental care; eye, ear, nose, and throat disorders; cancer; heart disorders; and aging. The final chapter is a discussion on the future of alternative medicine by the medical advisory board established for this book. Each chapter has a bibliography. The book contains a glossary, a general bibliography, and an extensive index.

Strengths of The Alternative Health & Medicine Encyclopedia include the arrangement of the chapters, the numerous tables throughout the text, and the bibliographies. Chapters are arranged in sections illustrating each disorder and a variety of healing techniques for a particular disease. For example, the chapter “Common Female Problems” contains a section on fibrocystic breast disease, which provides a definition and description of this disorder followed by a variety of treatments, including botanical medicines, hormone therapy, nutritional therapies, and vitamin and mineral therapies (p. 199-201). This format is followed throughout the text.

The book contains more than 110 useful and descriptive tables. Examples include choosing a botanical medicine, nutritional guidelines for relieving premenstrual syndrome, therapies for prostate enlargement, guidelines for choosing a holistic dentist, fighting food contamination, common sources of toxins in the home, and nutritional recommendations to increase the life span.

Bibliographies at the end of each chapter include extensive references to a variety of publications, organizations that may have been discussed in the chapter, and additional reading materials. This is beneficial in locating information on an alternative therapy that is not available in traditional medical resources.

A weakness of The Alternative Health & Medicine Encyclopedia is the attempt to cover all aspects of alternative healing techniques. This results in a source that may not provide enough depth and scope on the individual therapies and practices. For an introductory textbook on the topic of alternative medicine, the title word encyclopedia tends to be misleading and connotes comprehensiveness. The continually expanding array of alternative therapies and healing techniques makes in-depth coverage virtually impossible in 376 pages.

As medical schools integrate alternative therapies into their curricula, librarians will have to decide which alternative medicine and therapeutics texts to acquire. Natalie Kupferberg presents an acquisition analysis in “Alternative Medicine Goes Mainstream” [4]. She states, “in selecting materials, librarians should not be swayed by whether treatments have been proven effective but should collect works on both alternative and orthodox medicine so that consumers are given sufficient information to make a choice” [5]. The Alternative Health & Medicine Encyclopedia gives consumers a basic introduction to holistic health and alternative medicine. Medical and hospital libraries will want to complement this text with the Readers Guide to Alternative Health Methods [6] and Alternative Medicine: Expanding Medical Horizons [7] to facilitate informed choices.

Diabetes Sourcebook is a compilation of publications produced by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and its sub- and sister agencies. It is a mix of educational material, some written for the layperson and some for the practitioner, as well as statistical data that may be more useful to researchers. The Sourcebook's strength is that much of the material it reproduces is very informative and understandable for the layperson without being simplistic.

However, the Sourcebook's overall flaw is that most of the publications it reproduces are somewhat out of date and incomplete. For example, the 1993 edition of the annual statistical publication Diabetes Surveillance, which came out in the spring of 1994, is cited (p. 52). Anyone looking for the most up-to-date figures would be searching for the 1994 edition at this time. Fortunately, the footnote (p. 52) indicates where to write to obtain a copy of the report; one hopes the later edition would be available.

Some of the other documents date as far back as 1987 and 1988 (e.g., excerpts from The National Long-Range Plan to Combat Diabetes), others are not dated at all (e.g., several publications developed by the Michigan Diabetes Research and Training Center), and even the Spanish-language and African American educational materials cited in the appendix are largely from the 1980s. The Sourcebook is useful, however, to prompt the reader to keep an eye out for newer editions of the various publications and to identify which agencies to contact to find out the latest published information.

The chapter called "Diabetes Translation" includes a document titled The National Long-Range Plan to Combat Diabetes, which makes the important point that patients and their practitioners are not always aware of current medical advances (p. 303). This is a vital message for readers, who should realize that the Sourcebook itself as well as any other consumer or professional book will not be an ultimate source for finding out about new or alternative advances.

For example, the Sourcebook is not alone in omitting at least one important therapy: Richard S. Dillon, M.D., of Bryn Mawr Hospital in Pennsylvania, has published research results indicating that his Circulator Boot Therapy, a "new" type of compression boot, can effectively treat ulcers [1] and prevent amputation [2]. Although the Sourcebook addresses prevention of amputation, I found no mention of this therapy. Regarding amputation, a chapter on "Complications of Diabetes" states, "no effective medical treatment is available" (p. 372). This same chapter states, "in general, morbidity and mortality are high among diabetic patients who have amputations" (p. 381), so the information provided on amputation prevention should be more complete. Even if Dillon's compression-boot therapy is not considered "standard," any good consumer source book should at least inform readers of its existence so they can make informed choices.

Other major omissions are the American Diabetes Association's (ADA) new nutrition recommendations [3] and standards of medical care [4], both issued in 1994. Publishers of the Sourcebook would have been wise to delay publication to include these new guidelines.

Because the book is a compilation, there is often repetition among the documents reproduced. For example, several chapters and documents explain the difference between type I and type II diabetes mellitus. Although this kind of repetition may be useful for readers who choose to read only certain chapters, it becomes redundant for readers studying the whole volume. Due to the varying types of publications compiled, chapters alternate in tone as to whether they are directed toward the layperson or practitioner, and this requires the reader to adjust modes. It would have been more useful had the editors assimilated the information, filled in some gaps, and updated certain information, rather than just reprinting it. At a minimum, the indexing could be more useful. Most subject entries listed in the index do not contain any breakdowns. For example, under "complications," there are approximately 125 page numbers listed with no indication of which complication is addressed. One particularly useless entry is "diabetes mellitus" with approximately 105 page numbers and no breakdowns.

There is another book also en-