

Complementary and Alternative Medicine and Therapies

Includes:

- Chiropractic
- Massage Therapist

Definition of Complementary and Alternative Medicine

The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM), a component of the National Institutes of Health, defines some of the key terms used in the field of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). NCCAM is the federal government's lead agency for scientific research on CAM. Its mission is to explore complementary and alternative healing practices in the context of rigorous science, train CAM researchers, and disseminate authoritative information to the public and professionals.

CAM is defined by the NCCAM as "a group of diverse medical and health care systems, practices, and products that are not presently considered to be part of conventional medicine. Complementary medicine is used together with conventional medicine, and alternative medicine is used in place of conventional medicine." The NCCAM also notes that "the list of what is considered to be CAM changes continually, as those therapies that are proven to be safe and effective become adopted into conventional health care and as new approaches to health care emerge."

NCCAM groups CAM practices into the following domains:

- Whole medical systems, which are built upon complete systems of theory and practice. Examples include homeopathic medicine, and naturopathic medicine, traditional Chinese medicine, and Ayurveda.

- Mind-body medicine, which uses a variety of techniques to enhance the mind's capacity to affect bodily function and symptoms. Examples include meditation, prayer, mental healing, and therapies drawing on the creative arts, such as art, dance, or music. (*Note:* Art, dance, and music therapy programs are listed in the "Expressive/Creative Arts Therapies" section).
- Biologically based practices, which encompasses use of substances found in nature, such as herbs, foods, and vitamins. Some examples include dietary supplements, herbal products, and the use of other so-called natural but as yet scientifically unproven therapies.
- Manipulative and body-based practices are based on manipulation and/or movement of one or more parts of the body. Examples include chiropractic or osteopathic manipulation and massage.
- Energy medicine, which involves use of energy fields, is of two types. Biofield therapies are intended to affect energy fields that purportedly surround and penetrate the human body; examples include qi gong, Reiki, and Therapeutic Touch; bioelectromagnetic-based therapies involve the unconventional use of electromagnetic fields, such as pulsed fields, magnetic fields, or alternating-current or direct-current fields.

Note: The following information on health care careers in CAM is solely for information purposes and may not be construed as an acknowledgment of the therapeutic value or endorsement of these professions/organizations by the AMA. For the purposes of this *Directory*, the AMA is relying on the NCCAM's definition of CAM as authoritative.

Chiropractic

Chiropractic is a health profession aimed primarily at enhancing patients' overall health, functional improvement, and well-being without the use of drugs or surgery. More than 22 million people visited doctors of chiropractic last year for a variety of conditions, and more and more medical doctors are referring their patients to doctors of chiropractic.



Career Description

Doctors of chiropractic—often referred to as chiropractors or chiropractic physicians—practice a drug-free, hands-on approach to health care that includes patient examination, diagnosis, and treatment. Using broad diagnostic skills, chiropractors develop treatment plans that may include manual therapies (ie, manipulation/adjustments); nutritional, dietary, and lifestyle counseling; physiotherapy; and physical medicine and rehabilitative exercises.

Chiropractors are considered first-contact providers (ie, primary care providers), and are so defined in federal and state regulations, including within the Medicare program. For many neuromusculoskeletal conditions, such as lower back pain, the services provided by a chiropractor may be the primary method of treatment. When other health conditions exist, chiropractors often complement or support medical treatment by co-managing with other members of a patient's health care team.

Doctors of chiropractic assess patients through clinical examination, laboratory testing, diagnostic imaging, and other diagnostic interventions to determine which treatments are best suited for a patient's condition. Chiropractors will readily refer patients to the appropriate health care provider when chiropractic services are not suitable for the patient's condition.



Employment Characteristics and Outlook

Doctors of chiropractic represent the third largest doctoral-level health care field in the United States, after medical physicians and dentists. Nearly 82 percent are in full-time practice, with the average chiropractor working between 40 to 45 hours per week. The majority (61 percent) of chiropractors work in an office in which they are the only doctor. Nearly one third (31 percent) share an office with one or more chiropractors, while the remaining doctors either work in a multi-disciplinary setting, academia, or research.

Chiropractic and its role in the health sciences offers a career of opportunity and service. In return, it provides security, prestige, and solid income. The doctor determines working hours and is able to arrange these hours by appointment for the convenience of all. The doctor also decides vacation time and which days to take off during the week.

Job prospects for new chiropractors are expected to be good. In this occupation, replacement needs arise from retirement, and acute shortages of DCs exist in some areas of the United States.

The public's attitude towards chiropractic has been instrumental to the profession's growth and acceptance into mainstream health care. Moreover, a greater public awareness of health and health care has also increased the need for doctors of chiropractic. The need has been further increased by wider recognition of the advancements chiropractic has made in the field of body mechanics and public health.



Salary

The median annual income for doctors of chiropractic is approximately \$65,000, depending on geographic location and practice setting. Doctors of chiropractic have the potential to earn more than \$100,000 annually. In chiropractic, as in other types of independent practice, earnings are relatively low in the beginning and increase as the practice grows. For more information, refer to www.ama-assn.org/go/hpsalary.



Educational Programs

Doctors of chiropractic undergo a rigorous education in the healing sciences, similar to that of medical doctors. Once accepted into an accredited chiropractic college, the requirements are demanding—4 to 5 academic years of professional study are the standard.

This extensive education prepares doctors of chiropractic to diagnose health care problems, treat the problems when they are within their scope of practice, and refer patients to other health care practitioners when appropriate.

Length. All Doctor of Chiropractic programs culminate in a postbaccalaureate doctoral degree (DC). In total, the full curriculum for chiropractic students includes a minimum of 4,200 hours of classroom, laboratory, and clinical experience and frequently includes a minimum of a 1-year clinical-based program dealing with actual patient care.

Prerequisites. The typical applicant at a chiropractic college has already acquired nearly 4 years of premedical undergraduate college education, including courses in biology, inorganic and organic chemistry, physics, psychology, and related lab work.

Curriculum. Chiropractic students spend a significant portion of their curriculum studying clinical subjects related to evaluating and caring for patients. Anatomy, physiology, rehabilitation, nutrition, and public health are covered above and beyond a traditional medical education. Because of the hands-on nature of

chiropractic, and the intricate adjusting techniques, a significant portion of time is spent in clinical training.



Licensure/Certification/Registration

Chiropractors are licensed to practice in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and in many nations around the world. Licensure is handled at the state level by a regulatory Board, and all doctors are required to complete a comprehensive national board examination administered by the National Board of Chiropractic Examiners.

Additional postgraduate education opportunities are available in a variety of diplomate programs, including

- Nutrition
- Neurology
- Pediatrics
- Occupational health
- Orthopedics
- Acupuncture
- Physiological therapeutics and rehabilitation
- Diagnosis and internal disorders
- Diagnostic imaging
- Sports injuries and physical fitness

Nearly all third-party payers recognize doctors of chiropractic with regard to reimbursement.



Inquiries

Careers

American Chiropractic Association
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703 276-8800
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www.acatoday.org

For a listing of resources regarding a career in Chiropractic, visit: www.acatoday.org/career

Certification/Registration

For a listing of state boards overseeing chiropractic licensure, visit: www.acatoday.org/content_css.cfm?CID=753

Program Accreditation

The Council on Chiropractic Education, an agency certified by the US Department of Education, currently recognizes 15 chiropractic programs at 18 different locations. For a listing of chiropractic colleges, visit www.acatoday.org/career. For the CCE, visit www.cce-usa.org.