

A new research strategy in CAM

research tailored to the clinical reality of CAM practice.

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Review

There appears to be a gap between published studies showing little or no efficacy of CAM, and reports of substantial clinical benefit from patients and CAM practitioners. This “gap” might be partially due to the current focus on placebo-controlled randomized trials, which are designed to answer questions about the efficacy and safety of pharmaceutical agents.

In an attempt to fit this assessment strategy, complex CAM treatment approaches have been dissected into standardized and often simplified treatment methods, and outcomes have been limited.

Unlike conventional medicine, CAM has no regulatory or financial gatekeeper controlling their therapeutic “agents” before they are marketed. Treatments may thus be in widespread use before researchers know of their existence. In addition, the treatments are often provided as an integrated ‘whole system’ of care, without careful consideration of the safety issue.

Strategy for change

We propose a five-phase strategy for assessing CAM built on the acknowledgement of the inherent, unique aspects of CAM treatments and their regulatory status in most Western countries. These phases comprise:

- Context, paradigms, philosophical understanding and utilization
- Safety status
- Comparative effectiveness.
- Component efficacy
- Biological mechanisms.

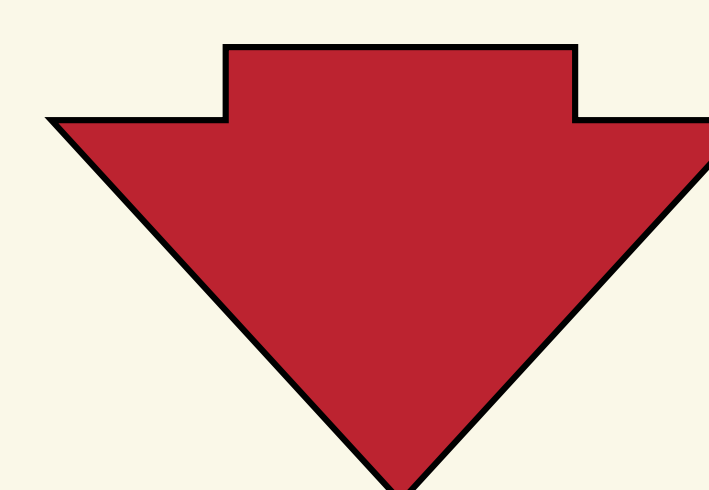
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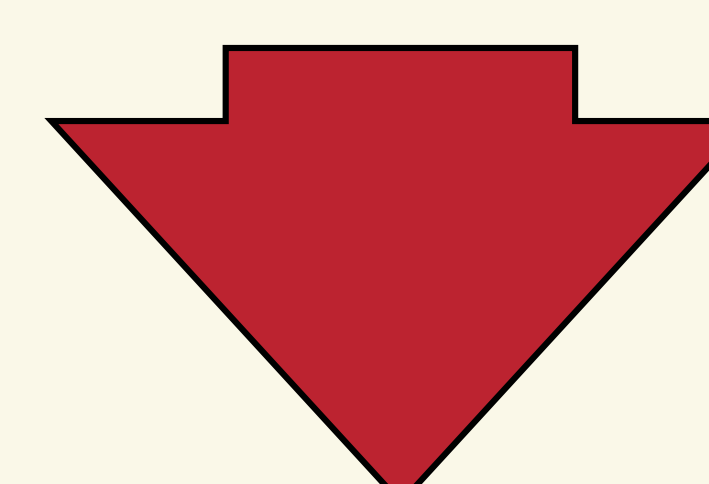
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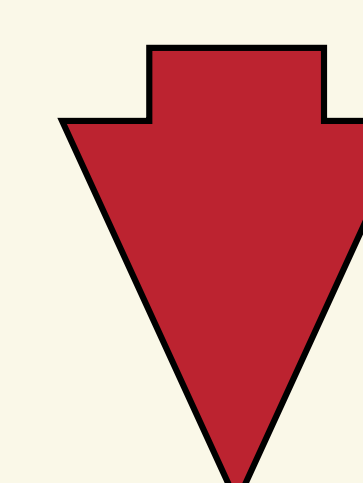
Screening of chemical substances



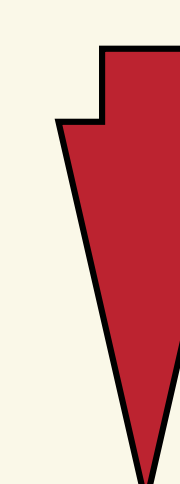
Biological mechanisms



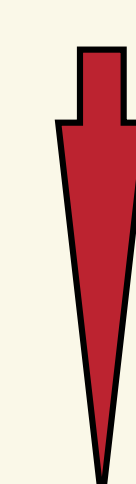
Phase I trials



Phase II trials

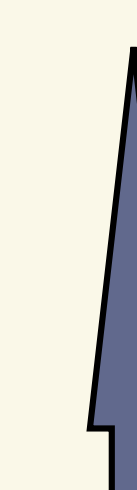


Phase III trials



Clinical practice

Biological mechanisms



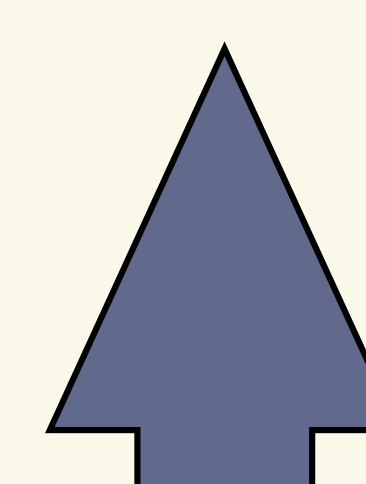
Component efficacy



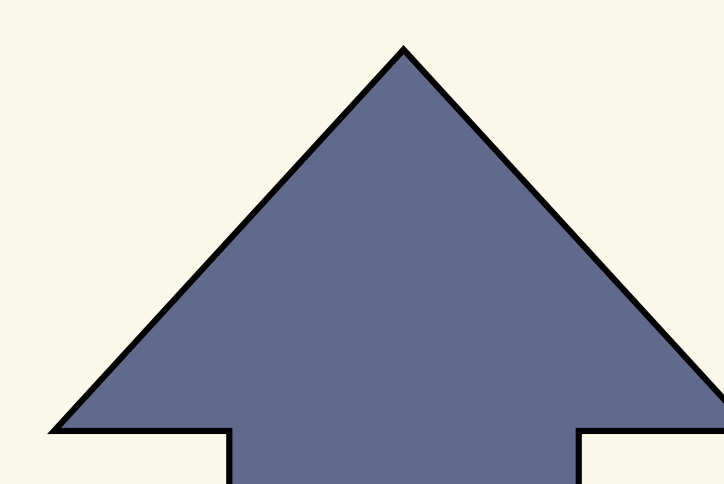
Comparative effectiveness



Safety status



Context, paradigms, philosophical understanding, and utilization



Clinical practice

Phases that contrast the proposed phased research strategy in CAM (blue arrows) with that conventionally used in drug trials (red arrows).

Conclusions

Using the proposed strategy will generate evidence relevant to clinical practice, while acknowledging the absence of regulatory and financial gatekeepers for CAM. It will also emphasize the important but subtle differences between CAM and conventional medical practice.