

# Opportunities with the Complementary and Alternative Medicine World

By Matthew J. Taylor, PT, PhD, RYT 500

**W**hat is your relationship with the complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) practices in your community? How do you talk about them to patients, staff, and professional peers? How often do you make referrals? How often do you get referrals? How much do they contribute to your bottom line?

These questions and answers define your “box” on CAM.

The Box [boks ]: *n.* The set of habituated thoughts, ideas, postures, and relationships that constrain creativity and insight. Clinical Mastery demands the box be broken down, recycled and transformed into new form.

The year 2010 is a clear dividing line between the Industrial Age and the Information Age. Relationships, collaboration, networking, and Web 3.0 are the buzz. In addition, physical therapists are shedding the old practices of turf wars, insular thinking, and segmental treatment approaches.

The emerging movement science is rapidly revealing efficacy behind many CAM practices. May 2009 marked an historic meeting between the Consortium of Academic Health Centers for Integrative Medicine (CAHCIM) and the Academic Consortium for Complementary and Alternative Health Care (ACCAHC). The “box” walls are breaking down as medical schools engage in new relationships with CAM professionals.

For fifteen years, I have had one foot firmly in the physical therapy world and the other in the CAM world. I have sat in the CAM world’s inner sanctums. I know the leadership. I have a profound respect for their professionalism and integrity. I am the president of the International Association of Yoga Therapists, a board member of ACCAHC, and have written and researched extensively on the topic. Most important, I have a successful 70 percent cash private practice that models what I share below.

## How the CAM World Sees Us

Here is how CAM providers see us, what strengths they have to share, a clinical rationale, and six practical action steps to take now. These are generalizations, of course, but physical therapy is revered as having a high level of training, knowledge, and a strong relationship with allopathic circles. However, they don’t understand why some physical therapists are so protective of

technique, especially since there are so many people in need of help from these techniques. In the CAM world, they have constructive dialogues on techniques (i.e., manual therapy) to improve standards and safety, as opposed to arguing about who can and cannot manipulate. They also wonder why so much of physical therapy is “cerebral,” planar-oriented movement. Why don’t physical therapists teach movement with more ease and grace? Why do physical therapy practices have all this fitness-center equipment when physical therapists know so much more? And why do some physical therapists disparage practices about which they know nothing? Good questions.

## Strengths CAM Providers Have to Share

As businesspeople, we need to ask why the public is spending billions of dollars on CAM practices. The answer is that CAM practices have centuries of consumer field testing. CAM practitioners have learned to provide what patients value:

- ▶ Private, personalized care
- ▶ Aesthetic beauty in décor and design
- ▶ Extended, meaningful conversation and relationships
- ▶ Gentle, nonviolent movement with awareness and precision
- ▶ A nonregional, practical whole-person technology for supporting well-being
- ▶ A cash-based business model, often with group delivery

## A Clinical Rationale

Modern neuroscience is revealing the complex matrix of human movement. Movement/action is the ground of all physical, mental, and spiritual health and wellness. The fitness industry will deliver fitness services efficiently as the lowest cost provider gaining the largest share. Future movement challenges will come from savvier, more demanding and complex clients in numbers that will overwhelm our system’s capacity. Private practice needs to broaden its perspective to the full spectrum of evidence-based medicine with an integrative biopsychosocial model. Taking the following six action steps will generate new “boxes” of relationships, delivery models, and revenue streams consistent with our profession’s pursuit of autonomous practice.

## Six Action Steps to Create New Boxes in Your Practice

Action, not cognition, is the fuel of real change and new creativity. Here's your movement prescription for your private practice in this new decade.

- 1. Build rapport with CAM providers.** Each month, meet with a CAM provider, visit a service, or invite in a CAM provider to your practice. Exchange practice challenges and ideal referral demographics while brainstorming collaborative efforts. Listen more than talk. There will be both good and scary experiences.
- 2. Consume a CAM service.** I saw a T-shirt a while ago that read "Move Your Butt and Your Mind Will Follow." The whole-brain leader of today values experiential knowledge as much as conceptual knowledge. Find a CAM practice that intrigues you. Immerse yourself for a three-month period.
- 3. Become the CAM gatekeeper for your clientele.** Your patients look to you for guidance and safety. Practicing these action steps and utilizing the resources below makes excellent fodder for newsletters, workshops, web content, tweets, and so on.
- 4. Sublet space.** Find a provider you respect and feel comfortable around. Invite them to lease space in your off-hours, as many practice in evenings and weekends.
- 5. Make referrals to trusted CAM providers.** Once you understand what they offer and how it complements your services, make appropriate referrals. You will be amazed at how such a "compliment" generates a steady stream of appropriate cash-oriented clientele in return.
- 6. Watch the mind.** Stay on guard to recognize the old "box" resurrecting itself with sarcasm, antagonism, or skepticism around CAM. Maintain prudent differentiation, but be sure that the old box walls don't blind you to a world out there and constrain your practice from moving forward with the best of science and the art of movement. ■

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### Resources

The Academic Consortium of Complementary and Alternative Health Care: <http://www.accahc.org>

Consortium of Academic Health Centers for Integrative Medicine: <http://www.imconsortium.org/>

North American Research Conference on Complementary and Integrative Medicine Conference Summary: <http://www.imconsortium-conference.org/downloads/PostConfReport.pdf>

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