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## Comparison of Swiss basic health insurance costs of complementary and conventional medicine.

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### Abstract

**BACKGROUND:** From 1999 to 2005, 5 methods of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) applied by physicians were provisionally included into mandatory Swiss basic health insurance. Between 2012 and 2017, this will be the case again. Within this process, an evaluation of cost-effectiveness is required. The goal of this study is to compare practice costs of physicians applying CAM with those of physicians applying solely conventional medicine (COM).

**METHODS:** The study was designed as a cross-sectional investigation of claims data of mandatory health insurance. For the years 2002 and 2003, practice costs of 562 primary care physicians with and without a certificate for CAM were analyzed and compared with patient-reported outcomes. Linear models were used to obtain estimates of practice costs controlling for different patient populations and structural characteristics of practices across CAM and COM.

**RESULTS:** Statistical procedures show similar total practice costs for CAM and COM, with the exception of homeopathy with 15.4% lower costs than COM. Furthermore, there were significant differences between CAM and COM in cost structure especially for the ratio between costs for consultations and costs for medication at the expense of basic health insurance. Patients reported better quality of the patient-physician relationship and fewer adverse side effects in CAM; higher cost-effectiveness for CAM can be deduced from this perspective.

**CONCLUSION:** This study uses a health system perspective and demonstrates at least equal or better cost-effectiveness of CAM in the setting of Swiss ambulatory care. CAM can therefore be seen as a valid complement to COM within Swiss health care.

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