

The difference between Western Scientific Medicine (WSM) and Complementary and Alternative (CAM) and Traditional Medicine (TM) is [...]

My chosen health condition is depression. Three different health practices used to manage or treat depression in NZ are SSRIs (WSM), acupuncture (CAM/TM) and St. John's Wort (CAM/TM).

SSRI stands for Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor and is an example of a WSM used to manage/treat depression [...]

Acupuncture [...]

St John's Wort is another example of a CAM/TM that is used to manage depression in New Zealand. The underlying philosophy of St John's Wort is that an extract from the plant *hypericum perforatum* contains hypoformin which is the 'drug' that makes St John's Wort effective for treating depression (5). It is believed to work in a similar way to SSRIs (and therefore is not recommended if you are also using them). Because it is a herbal remedy, it is seen as an alternative treatment for depression. St John's Wort is most often taken in tablet form but can also be taken as a liquid or brewed as a tea (5). Tablets are sold in a 3,000 or 4,000 mg dosage in NZ, which means that one or two tablets per day are needed (6). The tablets can be purchased from supermarkets, pharmacies and online. Because St John's Wort is known to interact with some prescription medicines (including birth control), it is important to discuss its use with your doctor (5). It is likely that someone will need to take St John's Wort for a number of months.

1

There are a number of advantages and disadvantages of SSRIs [...]

Advantages of acupuncture when used to manage/treat depression [...]

Advantages of St John's Wort include that it is relatively inexpensive (about \$1 per day for the tablets - 11) and is seen as effective for mild/moderate depression (12). This might be a good option for people who do not want to go to the doctor or who prefer to try natural medicines before using drugs. Some studies have shown that it is effective, but others have shown it is not effective, especially for more severe depression, which is a disadvantage (5). It may be seen as more acceptable by family members/friends or the patient than using antidepressants. If it works, it will have positive impacts for a patient's well-being, as they will feel happier, more confident and be able to function normally in social and life/work situations. There are, however, some important disadvantages of St John's Wort. As mentioned earlier, it may not be effective and this means money is wasted. Also mentioned earlier is that it can interact with a number of other medicines, such as SSRIs, the contraceptive pill, HIV and cholesterol medications (5). For example it can reduce

2

effectiveness of the pill and this could result in unplanned pregnancy (12). Some side effects include dizziness, nausea, loss of appetite, diarrhea (12).

Overall, I think that a combination of acupuncture and SSRIs are the most effective forms of treatment for depression, unless the depression is very mild, in which case it is worth trying St John's Wort first. I think it is probably important to see a doctor, however, as they are knowledgeable about St John's Wort as it is very popular. When balancing the advantages and disadvantages of the three health practices, it is clear that there are costs and side effects of each practice, but it is important to choose a treatment that is suitable for a patient's specific symptoms and severity of depression.

3

Note that a chart was provided by the student to show bibliographic details for the references used in the evaluation.