

Western Scientific Medicine (WSM) has a philosophy related to a technocentric approach – the body is a machine. Scientifically and medically proven processes are used to diagnose and treat an illness, disease or health condition (1), which is seen as something ‘going wrong’ with the body. Methods such as surgery and drugs are used to repair the body and get the ‘machine’ working smoothly again. In comparison, Complementary/Alternative Medicine (CAM) and Traditional Medicine (TM) have more holistic philosophies, where illness is seen as some imbalance in the body and the body is considered as a ‘whole’ (2) rather than parts that might need repairing. This aligns with the model of hauora. Complementary means it is used alongside another form of treatment and alternative means it is used instead of a more conventional treatment (2). TM comes from a cultural group’s attitudes, values and beliefs, so the specific philosophy depends on where it comes from. A widely used form of TM is TCM – Traditional Chinese Medicine, which includes use of herbs, acupuncture, moxibustion, cupping (3).

1

I have chosen the health condition of management of birthing pain and I will evaluate three health practices used for this: Epidural, hypnobirthing and TENS.

Epidural is an example of a WSM. It is used only in hospitals and must be administered by an anaesthetist, with medical staff used to monitor how the woman is responding. The philosophy behind epidural is that the use of a pain relief drug injected into the epidural space in the spinal column (4) is an effective form of pain relief, with no side effects for the baby. The injection results in a loss of feeling, including being able to feel pain, by blocking the transmission of signals through nerves in/near the spinal cord (4). This is therefore a WSM, as it is the use of a drug, given by medical staff in a hospital for pain relief. The procedures involved: The woman will be lying on her side and be given a local anaesthetic to numb the area. She will also have an IV drip inserted for fluids to be given. The anaesthetist will insert a needle into the spine. Then, a plastic tube (catheter) is inserted into the epidural space and this is where the pain relief drug flows through. The woman’s blood pressure and the baby’s heart rate are monitored throughout, and the epidural is removed after giving birth (4).

2

The philosophy behind using hypnobirthing [...]

TENS stands for [...]

There are many advantages and disadvantages of each type of health practice for managing birthing pain. I will explain these, and then make an overall comparison as a summary.

Advantages of epidural include its effectiveness for pain relief during labour. It is known as the most effective form of pain relief, as the numbing means no pain is felt while the epidural is in place (8). It also means that, if a caesarean is needed, the woman can be awake for the

procedure. It is also known to reduce blood pressure which is an advantage if the woman's blood pressure is too high (9). Another important advantage is that the drugs have no effect on the baby and no long-term effects on the woman, so in terms of physical well-being for the mum and baby, this is a good option. Also having an epidural might remove some of the stress and anxiety associated with giving birth, which positively affects the woman's state of mind (8). In NZ, epidural does not cost any money, as it is part of the publically-funded pregnancy/birth care offered. Epidural is seen as acceptable by society, but may not be easily accessed – the woman needs to be giving birth in a hospital, and the timing is important – if the baby is too close to being born, she will not be able to have it. This is a disadvantage of epidural pain relief. Other disadvantages include: The woman might find it a lot harder to push the baby (especially if it is her first), as she will not have full feeling in her lower half. This can lead to more medical interventions for the birth, such as vacuum extraction or C-Section (9), which potentially have many disadvantages/dangers for the mother and baby. Some more side effects include headache, nerve-damage, drop in blood pressure, bleeding, and infection where the needle was inserted (10).

3

Advantages of hypnobirthing [...]

Advantages of TENS [...]

Overall, I believe that the best option for managing birthing pain is to use TENS. This is because, after considering the advantages and disadvantages, this is the one that is most likely to be effective in relieving pain while at the same time allowing the woman to have total control over her birthing experience. If she were to have an epidural, she wouldn't be able to move around and try different positions, and it is more likely that she will have trouble pushing. Hypnobirthing is not very common, is expensive and time-consuming in preparation for the birth and is less proven to be effective, as well as not being well respected by many people. With TENS however, the cost is only \$60 (online hire company – 15) and this can be used both at home and in the hospital. No pain relief option is perfect, so it is worth women researching all their options.

4

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