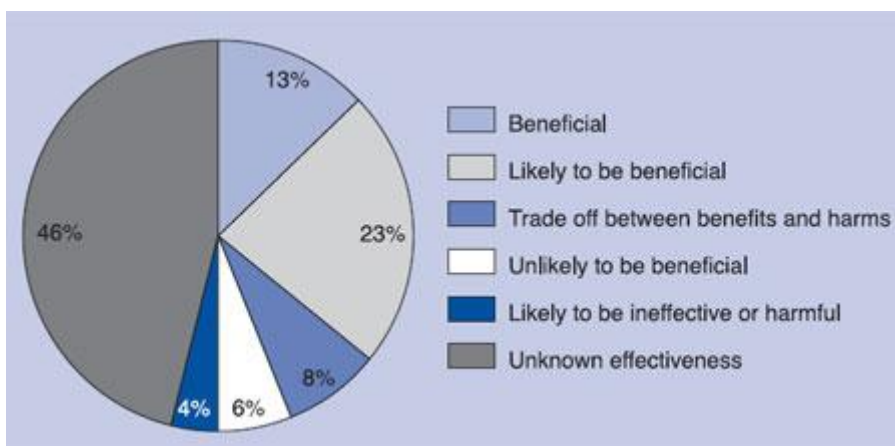


Interesting Sidebar from the British Medical Journal

Scientific heavyweights deplore the NHS money wasted on “unproved and disproved” treatments used by practitioners of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM), [1 2] but Lewith, a CAM proponent (see previous letter), is cited elsewhere as saying that the BMJ reckons that 50% of the treatments used in general practice aren’t proved, and 5% are pretty harmful but still being used. [3]

His data were taken from the BMJ Clinical Evidence website. A pie chart (see it below in the **Evidence-based Practice** posting) indicates that, of about 2500 treatments supported by good evidence, only 15% of treatments were rated as beneficial, 22% as likely to be beneficial, 7% part beneficial and part harmful, 5% unlikely to be beneficial, 4% likely to be ineffective or harmful, and in the remaining 47% the effect of the treatment was “unknown.”



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The text says, “The figures suggest that the research community has a large task ahead and that most decisions about treatments still rest on the individual judgements of clinicians and patients.” On 9 October 2007 the situation had changed—but not for the better. Treatments rated “beneficial” had decreased from 15% to 13%.

REFERENCES:

1. Kamerow D. Wham, bang, thank you CAM. *British Medical Journal* 2007 (Sep 29); 335: 647
2. Colquhoun D. What to do about CAM? *British Medical Journal* 2007 (Oct 13); 335: 736
3. Cope J. The great debate. *Healthwriter* 2007 (Apr): 1-3.