COMPLEMENTARY MEDICINE

**for nurses, midwives
and health visitors**

Joanna Trevelyan & Brian Booth

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Dedication

To Costi and Sue, who have endured so much; and Michael and Jonathan, conceived months after the start of this book, but born before the last page was written.

JT

BB

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FOREWORD

Medicine, along with many other areas of modern life, is under regular scrutiny and is in a constant state of flux and development. On the one hand orthodox medicine continues to develop improved medical and surgical techniques for treating all manner of conditions; on the other, along with the transformation of orthodox medical practice, there has been an increase in interest in complementary therapies among both the general public and health professionals, including nurses.

With the growth of complementary medicine in the UK have come a number of problems, as well as opportunities. While there is increasing evidence of wider interest in complementary medicine among nurses and doctors, there is still a strong undercurrent of scepticism and hostility. A burgeoning number of complementary therapy practitioners and wider public usage of complementary medicine do not, of themselves, provide proof of efficacy and safety. The Research Council for Complementary Medicine has spent over ten years encouraging a research ethos in the field. It is clear that the evidence of rigorous scientific research, whether the results were positive or negative, would be one way of meeting the criticism and doubts so often expressed. *Complementary Medicine for Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors* rightly places considerable emphasis on the value of research and the need for all involved in complementary medicine to understand its significance in the development of professional standards of practice.

The BMA report *Complementary Medicine: new approaches to good practice*, published in June 1993, called for improved training and education within the complementary medicine. It placed particular importance on the need for research as well as for some form of 'familiarisation on complementary medicine' for medical students. The same should hold true for student nurses and midwives. Orthodox medicine is more open to the positive elements of complementary medicine – the need now is for non-medically qualified practitioners to put their own house in order and look to developing closer links with the health service. The recently launched European Union project on Unconventional Medicine, combined with the freedom granted to general practitioners to 'delegate' to complementary practitioners, highlight the opportunities for collaboration which already exist.

The authors of *Complementary Medicine for Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors* are to be congratulated on trying to present an

overview of the situation as it is today in the UK. The growth of complementary medicine has led to the emergence of a wide range of organisations, and to the newcomer this can be somewhat daunting. How do the public know what is a validated and professional therapy or organisation? Where can the evidence be found to support the claims of practitioners in support of the therapies with which they are involved?

It is clear from the excellent response to the recent series of articles on complementary medicine and nursing in the *Nursing Times* that considerable energy and drive are being given to the practice of complementary therapies by an increased perception of their value in nursing practice. The authors of this book are responding to a real need for information, for research and for wider debate as to the best way forward.

Fourteen different therapies are studied in the book: they are presented in a manner which helps clarify some of the strong and weak points about each therapy, some of the principal organisations associated with it, and a selection of some of the published research that might be of interest. The book provides a simple and readable format for the newcomer to complementary medicine.

There is much work still to be done in assessing the efficacy and safety of complementary medicine. As the changes in the NHS continue, and purchasers are required to determine which services to offer, it is important that the public be prudent in their use of the therapies and discerning in their selection of practitioners. The future of complementary medicine depends, to a large extent, on it remaining just that: 'complementary' to orthodox medicine and not an alternative. Appropriate usage, supported by rigorous research, will lead to improved health care for all.

Complementary Medicine for Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors is an informative and worthwhile read. It will, I hope, lead to more detailed and in-depth reviews of current trends, scientific research and published reviews in the field of complementary medicine.

Jonathan Monckton
Director, Research Council for Complementary Medicine

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