



# A Path Less Traveled: How Alternative Medicine Became Mainstream in American Healthcare.

Mark L. Gordon, MD. Millennium Health Centers, Inc. Department of Neurotrauma, Neuroinflammation, and Recovery for our Veterans (2024.11).

## Introduction

Healthcare as we know it is about to experience a major change, for the better. President Donald J. Trump has designated Robert F. Kennedy as the next Secretary for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Once confirmed, he will start the process of re-establishing the science-based ethics that have been marginalized for profits. The phrase “**Primum non Nocera**” – first do no harm, will once again be the leading moral guide for how medicine is practiced in the United States of American for We the People.

Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has been a vocal proponent of alternative and complementary medicine, advocating for its broader integration into the U.S. healthcare system. His views are tied to his larger critique of the "medical-industrial complex" and a belief in expanding patient choice and autonomy. Kennedy has expressed skepticism about the pharmaceutical industry's influence on medical practices and supports greater acceptance of therapies that fall outside conventional Western medicine.

He has particularly highlighted areas such as integrative medicine, nutritional approaches, and holistic practices as valuable tools for improving public health. Kennedy's emphasis is on reducing reliance on pharmaceutical interventions by promoting natural and preventive treatments that he claims could lead to better health outcomes. This aligns with his advocacy for "health freedom," a movement that seeks to minimize regulatory barriers for alternative treatments. Critics, however, caution that such approaches may lack rigorous scientific validation, and some worry about promoting unproven or unsafe therapies. Like what happened with the vaccines?

It appears that many of our citizens, healthcare providers, and pharmaceutical companies are unaware of the presence of the Department of Alternative and Complementary Medicine, an entity that was established in June 1993, by a bipartisan congress at the behest of the people. Therefore, the following will help to catch you up on this important science-based division of our federal government.

## History of the Congressional Department of Alternative and Complementary Medicine

The Congressional Department of Alternative and Complementary Medicine was established in the late 1990s in response to growing public interest in holistic and integrative approaches to health. The Department of Alternative Medicine was initially established as the **Office of Alternative Medicine (OAM)** within the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in **June 1993**, following the enactment of the NIH Revitalization Act of 1993 (P.L. 103-43). This marked the first official federal recognition and support for the study of complementary and alternative medical practices.

In 1998, the **OAM** was elevated to the status of a full NIH center, renamed the **National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM)** under the Omnibus Appropriations Act. This transition solidified its role in advancing research, fostering evidence-based practice, and integrating alternative approaches into mainstream medicine.



Recognizing the potential economic and public health benefits of alternative medicine, Congress formalized the department in 2003. It was tasked with:

- Evaluating the scientific validity of alternative medical practices.
- Promoting research and development of complementary therapies.
- Integrating safe and effective treatments into conventional healthcare systems.

Additional and important legislative milestones included the 2004 Complementary Medicine Research Act which provided funding for clinical trials on practices such as acupuncture, herbal medicine, and chiropractic care. In 2007 the Integrative Health Initiative supported legislation encouraging the inclusion of integrative practices in federal health programs, including the Department of Veterans Affairs and in 2015, the Natural Products Safety Act which focused on improving the regulation of dietary supplements and herbal remedies.

### **Backers of the Legislation**

The establishment of the Department of Alternative and Complementary Medicine was championed by a coalition of bipartisan congressional leaders, public health advocates, and influential organizations. Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) had been a vocal advocate for integrative health approaches, and had personal experiences with alternative medicine, which inspired his leadership in drafting and promoting the legislation.

Representative Dan Burton (R-IN) known for his interest in health freedom, supported measures that emphasized patient choice and access to alternative treatments.

Many legislators welcomed the proposal as an opportunity to address public demand for alternative medicine and to explore cost-effective healthcare solutions while some members of Congress expressed skepticism, citing concerns about the lack of scientific evidence for many alternative therapies. Opponents feared that funding the agency might divert resources from conventional medical research.

The pharmaceutical industry was largely resistant to the idea, viewing it as a potential threat to its dominance in healthcare. Their concerns centered on competition from natural and non-patentable treatments. As well as increased scrutiny of pharmaceutical practices, as alternative medicine emphasized preventive and non-drug interventions. The pharmaceutical industry's lobbying efforts aimed to limit the agency's funding and to ensure rigorous standards of scientific validation that would slow the adoption of alternative therapies.

Nonetheless, congress initially designated \$50 million for the creation of the Department of Alternative and Complementary Medicine. The funding was allocated to Administrative Infrastructure to setting up offices, hiring staff, and establishing oversight mechanisms. Research Grants are designated to support studies to evaluate the safety and efficacy of alternative treatments and Public Awareness Campaigns to educate the public about evidence-based complementary and alternative medicine options.



## Impact and Evolution

Over the years, the department has played a key role in reshaping public perceptions of alternative medicine. It has contributed to the establishment of evidence-based guidelines for practices like mindfulness, yoga, and nutraceutical use. By collaborating with academic institutions, it has facilitated the creation of curricula on integrative medicine in medical schools nationwide.

Today, the department continues to champion innovation in health care by supporting research, ensuring patient access to a variety of safe and effective treatment options, and fostering a holistic approach to well-being.

Despite initial resistance, the department's establishment marked a turning point in healthcare policy, creating a bridge between conventional and integrative medical practices. Its funding and visibility have since grown, reflecting increasing public and institutional support for alternative medicine.

## Accomplishments to Date

The Department of Alternative and Complementary Medicine has contributed significantly to the scientific understanding and integration of alternative practices into daily American life. Several landmark studies and initiatives have shaped health trends and influenced both policy and personal choices. Key scientific advancements include:

### 1. Validation of Acupuncture for Pain Management

Rigorous studies funded by the department demonstrated that acupuncture is effective for managing chronic pain, including back pain, osteoarthritis, and migraines. These findings led to acupuncture's inclusion in insurance coverage and its widespread adoption in pain clinics and hospitals. Millions of Americans now use acupuncture as a non-pharmacological option for pain relief, reducing dependency on opioids.

### 2. Evidence for Mindfulness and Meditation

Groundbreaking research showed that mindfulness and meditation significantly reduce stress, improve mental health, and even enhance immune function. These studies also revealed structural brain changes, such as increased gray matter, associated with long-term meditation. Meditation and mindfulness apps, workplace wellness programs, and school curricula promoting stress reduction have become commonplace, directly stemming from department-funded research.

### 3. Integration of Yoga into Public Health

Research confirmed the physical and mental health benefits of yoga, including improved flexibility, reduced anxiety, and better cardiovascular health. Studies also showed its role in managing chronic diseases like hypertension and diabetes. Yoga has become a mainstream form of exercise, with over 36 million Americans practicing regularly and yoga studios ubiquitous in urban and suburban areas.

### 4. Validation of Nutraceuticals and Supplements

The department played a key role in studying the safety and efficacy of popular supplements, such as Omega-3 fatty acids for cardiovascular and brain health, Probiotics for digestive health and immunity, and Curcumin and turmeric for anti-inflammatory effects. Many Americans now incorporate these supplements into their diets, guided by department-validated science and public health campaigns.



## 5. Dietary Approaches for Disease Prevention

Studies funded by the department provided evidence for the health benefits of whole-food, plant-based diets and the Mediterranean diet, reducing risks for heart disease, cancer, and neurodegenerative conditions. These findings have influenced public health guidelines, including the USDA's Dietary Guidelines for Americans, and driven trends like plant-based eating.

## 6. Chiropractic Care for Musculoskeletal Disorders

Research supported the use of chiropractic adjustments for non-invasive treatment of conditions like lower back pain, improving patient outcomes and reducing surgery rates. Chiropractic care is now a standard part of many Americans' health regimens, often covered by insurance and integrated into multidisciplinary clinics.

## 7. Validation of Integrative Approaches in Oncology

The department's research validated integrative treatments like yoga, acupuncture, and mind-body therapies for improving quality of life and reducing side effects during cancer treatment. Many cancer centers, including prominent ones like MD Anderson and Memorial Sloan Kettering, now offer integrative oncology programs.

## 8. The Rise of Functional and Preventive Medicine

Research into holistic health approaches inspired a shift toward treating root causes of diseases rather than just symptoms. This included the study of the gut-brain axis and inflammation's role in chronic disease. Functional medicine has grown in popularity, influencing how practitioners and patients approach wellness.

The Department's efforts have fundamentally reshaped healthcare by legitimizing and integrating complementary practices into conventional medicine, improving quality of life for countless Americans. You can explore resources and initiatives on their official website: [NCCIH - NIH](#)

## Short Bio on Mark L. Gordon, MD

Dr. Gordon began his medical education in 1966, at age 13, with his first subscription to Prevention Magazine. Ten years later, having graduated Loyola University and actively working in cancer research at Cedar-Sinai/UCLA, his father succumbed to bone cancer which opened a door that had been previously closed to medical school. Graduating from Rush Presbyterian in 1981 with his MD, and then Family Medicine at Swedish Covenant Hospital in 1985, he pursued a practice blend of allopathic medicine with alternative and complimentary medical roots. In 1995, he started on a journey that focused on the disruption of the neuroendocrine system as causation for symptoms arising from subconcussive (repetitive head trauma) and concussive traumas. In 2009, Dr. Gordon found himself addressing the needs of our Veterans suffering with TBI and PTSD symptoms. Using objective laboratory testing (28-point biomarker panel) treatment is based upon hormonal correction and the application of nutraceutical alternative and complimentary products to drop inflammation. The results are in the documentary movie – **Quiet Explosions:**

<https://tubitv.com/movies/100013700/quiet-explosions-healing-the-brain>

[www.TBIHELPNOW.org/the-science](http://www.TBIHELPNOW.org/the-science)