Belief in and use of complementary therapies among family physicians, internists and orthopaedists in Germany - cross-sectional survey.

Few studies have compared the belief in and the use of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) across different medical specialties. To investigate to what extent family physicians, internists and orthopaedists working in private practice in Germany (i) belief in the efficacy of CAM therapies; (ii) use these therapies for treating patients and (iii) whether beliefs and use are associated with basic professional attitudes. A four-page questionnaire was sent to nation-wide random samples of the three groups of physicians. Participants were asked to indicate their belief in the efficacy and their use of seven CAM treatments and to rate their agreement to statements on orthodox and heterodox professional views, patient-provider relationship and placebo effects. A total of 935 of 2018 (46%) physicians contacted sent back a questionnaire. The belief in specific effects of CAM therapies varied strongly within and between specialties, but overall many physicians hold positive views. Internists were more skeptical than family physicians and orthopaedists (P < 0.001); 23% of family physicians, 6% of internists and 31% of orthopaedists reported to use four or more CAM therapies more often than once a week. Frequent CAM use was strongly associated with being an orthopaedist and a higher overall belief in CAM modalities. Holding
orthodox professional views predicted low CAM use. Many physicians (particularly, family physicians and orthopaedists) working in private practice in Germany use CAM therapies frequently and believe in their efficacy. Professional views and the specific working situation seem to influence use and believe strongly.

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