**LEISURELY TRAILS, FALLING ROCKS AND DETOURS: A RESEARCH JOURNEY**

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**Purpose:** To creatively present the experiences of three nursing researchers in developing and maintaining a program of research with a focus on the use of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) among rural residents.

**Rationale/Conceptual Basis/Background:** A program of research, that is a series of connected progressive studies carried out over time, has the potential to impact rural nursing practice in ways that individual studies cannot. A program of research can also be the venue for mentoring junior faculty members into the research enterprise. The major challenge of improving understanding of the role that CAM plays in the health care practices of rural residents motivated the research team to embark on this journey. Reviewing the journey of a team of researchers over time, the challenges, and detours, can be instructive to other teams as they travel on their own research journeys.

**Methods:** The journey began with several collaborative studies on the use of CAM by older rural dwellers. Two senior faculty members, one junior faculty and a graduate student constituted the original team. Over time the membership has changed as individuals shifted focus and left, or as individuals with additional skills were needed for a particular project. After almost 15 years, two of the original team members plus one (now senior) investigator who joined early on continue to be actively engaged in the research program. The focus of the research took a turn with recognition of the importance of general health literacy to improving health care, and more specifically the Institute of Medicine’s recognition of the lack of research in the area of health literacy regarding CAM. The research team’s journey turned to the conceptualization and development of a model of CAM health literacy that was subsequently used as the basis for creating and testing a measure of CAM health literacy, the MSU CAM Health Literacy Scale. Additional challenges were geographic distances between team members and obtaining resources to continue the work in lean funding times.

**Implications for research, rural health and/or rural practice:** The overall goal of this journey was two-fold: to mentor junior faculty to become productive principal investigators and to pursue a line of research that would enhance the decision making of older rural adults living with chronic health conditions. Maintaining sufficient continuity in the research team has been critical to the development and sustenance of the work while also being open to enlisting help from additional members when the situation warrants. Addressing CAM health literacy and other self-care practices has informed and enhanced this research program and seems to be a genuine fit with the intent of the research. The MSU CAM Health Literacy Scale, itself, has the potential to contribute significantly to the ability of scientists or health care providers to assess health literacy. This instrument may provide a psychometrically sound measure to assess the effects of nursing interventions aimed at increasing consumers’ abilities to make informed self-management decisions about the use of complementary and alternative therapies.

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