because they may serve as catalysts for follow-up research (using the traditional hierarchy), which in turn might lead to new knowledge regarding diagnosis, therapy, and/or prevention. This double strategy may open another door towards the concept of integrative medicine.

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Uncontrolled therapeutic observations in complementary medicine—What is the benefit?

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Objective: A considerable part of articles about complementary therapies focus on uncontrolled interventions administered in the context of clinical practice. According to the therapy-related hierarchy of scientific evidence ⟨http://www.cebm.net/index.aspx?o=1025⟩, however, such publications are associated with a very low evidence level. Since a perceived positive therapeutic result gained after an uncontrolled intervention may be due to at least seven factors, six of which are unspecific [2], no conclusion can be drawn regarding a specific therapeutic effect (i.e., *post hoc ergo propter hoc*). Does that mean that such reports do not have any benefit?
Method: A systematic search was carried out in electronic databases as well as in current textbooks on evidence-based medicine and complementary medicine. The reference lists of all relevant articles were perused.
Results: The identified contributions suggest that the (anecdotal) information gained in uncontrolled therapeutic interventions may indeed be valuable, particularly in (but no limited to) the following cases:

- detection of possible side effect, potential new therapeutic indications, and/or problems regarding compliance [1];
- generation of new hypotheses [3].

Discussion: Vandenbroucke [3] suggested differentiating between two hierarchies of study design: one for intended effects of therapy (*cf.*, ⟨http://www.cebm.net/index.aspx?o=1025⟩) and another one for discovery and studying new explanations. In the latter hierarchy, the traditional ranking of the levels of evidence is reversed: uncontrolled interventions administered in the context of clinical practice (as well as findings in patient or laboratory data and in the literature) are given the greatest importance

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