



concepts which had relevancy and which were named “key-words”, were classified according to their location in the entire article: in the title, in the descriptor or in both of them. Each key-word, which was found in the papers, was counted the number of times it appeared in each one of them. Due to the vast number of different key-words which were found in the sample, numerical codes were given for groups of key-words which were related in their meaning.

Statistical calculations were carried out concerning the data and entered in tables, while drawing up a comparison between the four sub-periods in order to follow-up on the different trends during the period of the survey.

A word dictionary was created out of all the key-words which were found in the articles and a prototype of an authoritative word dictionary, i.e. a thesaurus, was compiled, containing the central subjects which were found among these key-words. This dictionary was compiled in the knowledge that during the collection of data, such a thesaurus did not exist in the field of alternative medicine within the databases in which the search was conducted. The dictionary included those terms and concepts which were found only in those articles which were selected to figure in the sample. In addition, a distinction was made between key-words whose gist indicated a positive and/or factual attitude or approach and key-words whose gist indicate a negative and /or skeptical attitude or approach to the subject of alternative medicine.

The sample comprised a total of 3743 articles, of which 195 articles were found in the first sub-period, 443 articles in the second sub-period, 860 articles in the third sub-period and 2236 articles in the fourth sub-period. From these data it may be observed that during the first three sub-periods the growth in the quantity of articles was consistent and slow. In contrast, there was a conspicuous acceleration of the growth process in the fourth sub-period.

A similar development was observed in the quantity of key-words which were found during the period of the survey. A total of 7678 key-words were found, of which 405 were in the first sub-period, 861 in the second sub-period, 1691 in the third sub-period and 4721 in the fourth sub-period.

The number of key-words differing as to their connotation which were found in the sample reached 286. Due to the fact that a grouping was effected of the key-words which were related as to their meaning, it was noted that the number of clusters of key-words reached 113 in the fourth sub-period, versus 43 clusters of key-words which were to be found in the first sub-period. It can be observed that an evident growth process occurred during the period covered by the survey. In an analysis that was made to compare between the key-words that were found in the titles versus those that were found in the descriptors, a greater acceleration could be observed in the quantity of key-words that were found in the descriptors.

A follow-up of the contents of the key-words shows a clear quantitative growth of those whose content indicates a positive and/or factual approach to the field of alternative medicine, versus a contrary process which occurred in those whose content indicates a negative and/or skeptical approach to this field. Likewise, with the appearance of new key-words in the articles, such as: “complementary medicine” and “integrative medicine”, one can deduce that a fundamental change has occurred in the authors’ approach to the new discipline. The appearance of these key-words can consolidate the legitimacy that was accorded to the discipline of alternative medicine within the medical establishment.

An analysis of the geographical location in which the various papers were published, indicates an increasing gap between the quantity of papers which were published in the United States of America and Great Britain, and the quantity published in the other countries included in the sample. It can be

seen that this gap has widened considerably during the years 1990 - 1994. Furthermore, the gap has widened between the United States and Great Britain. The negligible quantity of articles published in countries which are not considered as “western” constitutes another remarkable fact.

According to the results that can be learned from the tables and graphs, it seems that there is a high degree of correlation between the growth process occurring in the articles published on the subject of alternative medicine and the results observed in previous bibliometrical surveys. These surveys, which dealt with various scientific fields, showed that the growth process in the publication of papers in a new field was slow at first; at a certain stage one could note a steep growth curve till it reached a saturation stage from which, after a period in which the quantity of articles remained stable, this field became a discipline within that science from which it evolved or developed into a new, independent discipline.

The point where the quantity of articles during the years 1990 - 1994 is located, apparently indicates that the field of alternative medicine is still situated at some place on that same steep growth curve and has not yet reached the saturation stage.

Amongst the proposals for a new survey, the continuation of this survey during the years 1995 - 1999 has been discussed, with the aim of finding the saturation point in the quantity of articles - and the time at which the subject of alternative medicine becomes a branch discipline within the field of scientific-establishment medicine or a new, independent discipline.

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