

# Knowledge and Practices of Complementary and Alternate Medicine among Cancer Patients

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** To assess the knowledge, practices of Complementary and Alternative Medicine in Cancer patients.

**Study Design:** A Cross sectional Hospital based study.

**Place and Duration of Study:** This study was conducted in Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre, Karachi from May to November 2010.

**Materials and Methods:** The study was conducted by using non- probability purposive sampling with structured questionnaire on 375 cancer patients of JPMC oncology OPD's. Informed consent was taken. Data was entered, analyzed on Statistical Package for the Social Science version 19.

**Results:** Out of 375 patients, commonest age group was 40-49 (48.5%) of the patients had used complementary, alternative medication for the cure of their cancers. The major reasons assessed for using alternative medicine was the high cost of conventional medication (82.4%). 43.4% had gone to Peer/ Faqeer/ Moulvi, 32.4% had taken medication from Hakim, 24.2 % homeopathic medication. 22.9% were illiterate as compared to 9.1% matric passed with average monthly income of Rs.5000-10,000. 48.5% of the patients claimed using complimentary, alternate medication at some stage during their illness. 80% of the patients using complementary, alternative medications had been diagnosed with Gastrointestinal Tract cancers as compared with other cancers. The patients that were previously using Complementary, alternative medicine (48.5%) preferred using allopathic medication (90.9%) in future.

**Conclusion:** Every patient has the right to choose, decide newer, advanced forms of medical Treatment, scientific methods, a relatively high number of patients had used Complementary, alternative medicine for the treatment of their ill ness. An awareness/ procedural program is of utmost important for cancer patients. Government must facilitate cancer patients as cancer is on the rise in Pakistan.

**Key Words:** Complementary, Alternative Medicine, Cancer, Allopathy.

## INTRODUCTION

A health improvement with cost savings for the CIM therapy versus usual care<sup>1</sup>. Complementary and alternative medicine is an umbrella term covering a diverse array of healing modalities<sup>2</sup> According to the definition provided by the National Center for Complementary, Alternative Medicine, Complementary, Alternative Medicine (CAM) is a broad domain of healing resources encompasses all health systems, modalities, practices, their accompanying theories, and beliefs, those intrinsic to the politically dominant health system of a particular society or culture in a given historical period. Pakistan is a developing country. Majority (66%) lives in rural areas.<sup>3</sup> Low literacy, cultural beliefs , practices leads to self care, home remedies, consultation with traditional healers in rural community.<sup>4</sup> According to one estimate, >80% of the developing world's population still dependence on the complementary, alternative systems of medicine<sup>5</sup> The prevalence of CAM use is estimated at 25% among residents of the United Kingdom,<sup>[5]</sup> 50% among German, French<sup>6</sup> and Australian<sup>7</sup> populations, 42% to 69% among residents of the United States.<sup>8</sup> A

summary of 26 surveys across 13 countries concluded that the prevalence of CAM use by cancer patients overall was 31.4% (range, 7% to 64%).<sup>9</sup> Most cancer patients combine CAM with conventional therapy<sup>10</sup> The increasing interest in CAM among cancer patients is due to limitations of conventional cancer treatment, side effects by allopathic medical therapies (e.g., chemotherapy and radiation therapy), low-invasive nature of treatment, increased advertising, media coverage of CAM, or the desire for holistic or natural treatments. As cancer incidence increases, survival time lengthens, the population seeking information about and access CAM is likely to increase. In Pakistan use of spiritual practices, prayer, worships for the purpose of cure or an improvement in an illness are common. Faiths healers have been reported to be major source of care for people with mental problems especially women with low literacy.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

A cross sectional Hospital based study was conducted May to November 2010. Sample size of 375 patients was drawn using non- probability purposive sampling. Data was collected through structured questionnaire

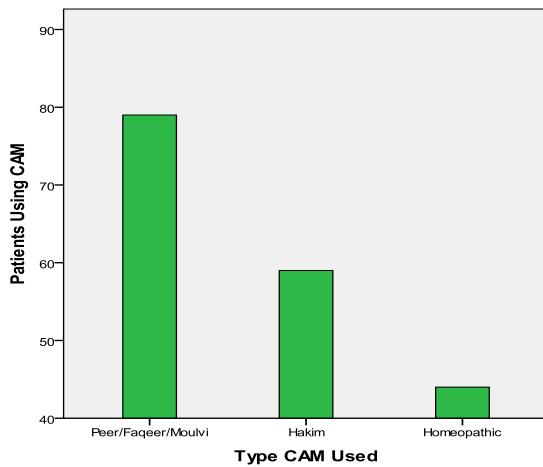
The study was conducted on cancer patients presenting to Jinnah Post Medical Center oncology Out Patients Department's. Informed consent was taken from the respondents. Data was entered, analyzed on Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 19.

## RESULTS

Out of 375 patients 62.7% were female, 37.3% male respondents. Commonest age group was 40-49 years. Use of Peer/ Faqeer/ Moulvi was the most prevalent choice (43.4%). The remaining 32.4% had taken medication from Hakim, 24.2% had taken homeopathic medication. The use of alternative modalities decreased with the increasing level of education and household income. Majority of them were illiterate with average monthly income of Rs.5000-10,000. 48.5% of the patients claimed using complimentary, alternate medication at some stage during their illness.

**Table No.1: Comparison of literacy level among patients using complementary and alternative medication**

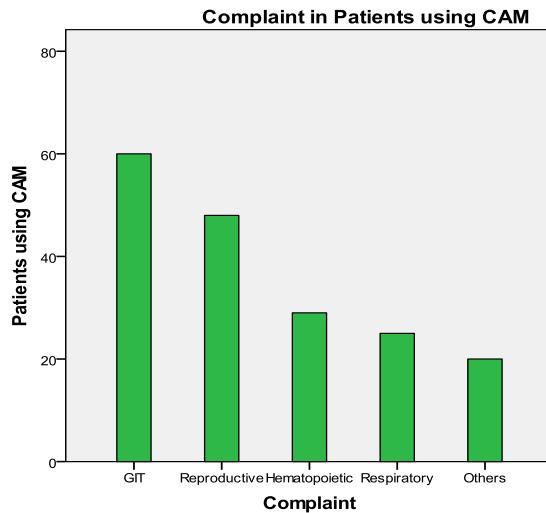
Literacy Level * Prior CAM Use			CAM Use			
Literacy Level	Level	Count	No	Yes	Total	
	Illiterate	98	86	184		
Primary		Count	34	39	73	
Matric		Count	38	34	72	
Intermediate		Count	9	13	22	
Above Intermediate		Count	14	10	24	
Total		Count	193	182	375	
		% of Total	51.5%	48.5%	100.0%	



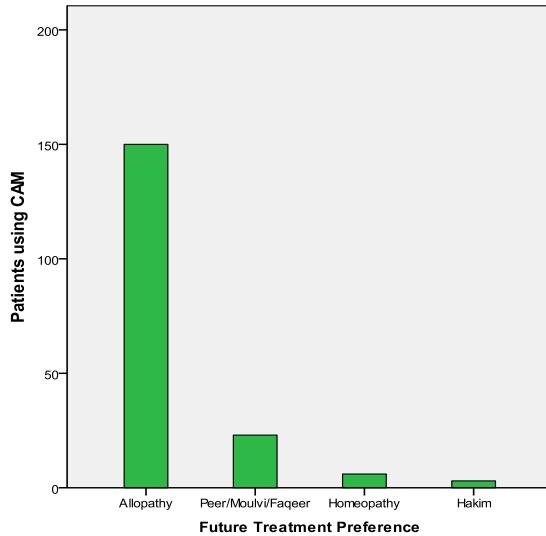
**Figure No.1.1: Type of complementary & alternative medicine used by patients prior coming to hospital.**

The major reasons cited for using alternative medicine were the high costs of conventional medication (82.4%) followed by persuasion from family or other patients. 67.2% believed in the effectiveness of alternative medicine and 32.8% doubted the efficacy of alternative treatment.

With increased literacy level the usage of CAM decreased. 52% frequency difference b/w illiterate & matric passed. The major source of information for alternative medicine was friends, family. The patients previously used CAM (48.5%) preferred using allopathic medication (90.9%) in future. Most patients shifted to allopathic mode of treatment after using CAM due to no improvement in their conditions or after they had awareness about allopathic medication & procedures.



**Figure No.1.2: Comparisons of different Cancers among CAM users**



**Figure No.1.3: Future treatment preferences in Cancer patients.**

## DISCUSSION

Almost half (48.5%) of the patients that were included in this study had used complementary, alternative medication for the cure of their cancers. In a study from Rawalpindi, more than two third of the study participants had used alternative modalities at some point of their illness. The commonest was Quranic verses/Dam darood, spiritual healing which corresponded to the cultural, religious beliefs of their population.<sup>[10]</sup> Most patients who used Complementary, alternative medicine were found to have GIT cancers followed by reproductive system cancers, blood cancers, respiratory cancers and others.

Patients wanted to maximize their chances for survival by opting different treatment options other than Allopathy. Patients with advanced disease turned to CAM for hope after conventional treatment failed. Most patients used CAM to feel more hopeful. Although reasons for hope are not well measured nor the term well-defined,<sup>[11]</sup> hope may be the single greatest reason for using CAM therapies. One third of the outpatients expected CAM to cure their disease, which confirms other studies.<sup>[12, 13, 14]</sup>

Alternative therapies had experienced a revival over the past decade, fueled in part by the public's desire to participate in their own health care, a perception that the medical profession had failed to find a cure for cancer, despite almost three decades of war on cancer.<sup>[15]</sup> Expanded research initiatives are needed to determine the safety, efficacy of drug and herb or vitamin interactions. Whether we call these approaches medicines, alternatives, unconventional or complementary approaches, or natural herbal remedies, interest in them is here to stay.<sup>[16]</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The study proved the use of complementary, alternative medicine (CAM) is part of social scope of oncology patients. A relatively high number of patients had used CAM for the treatment of their illness. While the CAM modalities used are diverse, peer/ Faqeer are most popular. The increasing and concomitant use of CAM with conventional allopathic medicine underlines the need for implementation of a surveillance system to report, monitor possible threatening drug-herb interactions and urge the oncologists to openly address their patient's knowledge, attitude and practices of CAM.

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