



PUBLIC AWARENESS ON COMPLEMENTARY/ ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE AS A MODALITY OF THERAPY IN ADVANCED CANCER PATIENTS, A SURVEY FROM IRAQ

Anmar Alharganee, Saba Almaawi, Zainab M. Hassan and Musaab Alaboodi
Baghdad Medical City Hospital National Centre of Cancer,

ABSTRACT

Recent advances in therapeutic options for treating advanced malignancies have increased the survival levels to higher figures. However, public conception on these colossal changes is still limited. Complementary and alternative medicine is still a popular mode of therapy among many patients and their caregivers especially in many countries around the world and Iraq is considered one of them. In this survey we tried to measure the level of awareness among sample population about the effect of alternative medicine as a therapeutic substitute to chemotherapy, radiotherapy and immunotherapy in advanced malignancies. A questionnaire survey was designed to assess the level of awareness in three different scenarios where advanced malignancy was one of them. Surprisingly, high rates were documented to consider complementary therapy as a successful alternative to the standard of care among advanced cancer patients. Besides, in many countries around the world alternative medicine options are not discussed properly with the consulting oncologist and in sometimes creates discomfort in treatment decision meetings with the patient. It is crucial to discuss alternative options of therapy with treating physicians and to advertise more the recent advances in cancer management and the impact of personalized medicine and genomic profiling researches on survival rates and the quality of life.

KEYWORDS: malignancies, chemotherapy, genomic profiling, management.

INTRODUCTION

The usage of complementary and alternative medicine to treat cancer has increased dramatically in the last years^[1]. Studies revealed that patients with advanced malignancies tend to exploit these therapeutic options more often than others in the early stages of the disease. This alternative therapeutics may include for instance acupuncture, chiropractic, herbal medicine, hypnotherapy and religious therapy. Studies have shown that many patients living with advanced malignancies may rely more on complementary medicine options in addition or apart from their standard of care medicine^[2]. Oncologists report several patients with metastatic diseases refusing conventional therapy due to their beliefs in alternative medicine. Moreover, such concepts considered to be a direct cause of disease progression and decrease in overall survival^[3]. The major advances in personalized medicine and genomic profiling improved the quality of life among patients used to be considered as terminal and increased overall survival in a tremendous way^[4].

In this survey we will highlight public conception on complementary medicine as a therapy of cancer instead of other already proved treatment options within the standard guidelines.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Public awareness on complementary/alternative medicine was assessed through a questionnaire survey in three different medical scenarios. The first one was about a 19 Years old female college student, suffers from frequent tummy aches, gases and indigestion. Whereas, the second one was about a 55 years old male with widespread disseminated cancer. Finally, the third scenario discussed the benefit of alternative medicine in the treatment of a 75 years old male with severe pneumonia and lives in a nursing home. Subjects were approached in a random way by a medical doctor within various public places like parks, offices, schools, shops, city centers and malls. Anonymity was preserved through the whole survey.

RESULTS

83 subjects participated in the survey, 52% were male, median age was 35 years (range from 14 to 85). 48% reckoned that the usage of complementary medicine modalities of management alone has 30-60% chance of success in treating a 19 years old female college student suffers from indigestion. Interestingly, 46% believed that complementary medicine therapeutic options only have at least 30% success rate in treating a 55 years old male with widespread advanced cancer (table).

	Subjects conception on Complementary/ Alternative medicine was assessed according to 3 different medical scenarios		
	19 Years old female college student, suffers from frequent tummy aches, gases and indigestion	55 years old male with widespread disseminated cancer	75 years old male with severe pneumonia and lives in a nursing home
Complementary /alternative medicine success rate (Median %)	50%	30%	30%
Sub-category	Range (0-100%)	Range (0-100%)	Range (0-70%)
0-10%	21%	34%	30%
11-29%	7%	7%	14%
30-60%	48%	46%	53%
61-100	24%	13%	3%

Repeated measures ANOVA P <0.005

DISCUSSION

It is essential that health care professionals educate the public about benefits, pitfalls and level of evidence behind the use of complementary medicine in treating advanced malignancies. Complementary medicine usage among cancer patients might be explained by its effect to overcome anxiety, pain or extreme fatigue. Conversely, there are serious interactions and unreported side effects from alternative medicine therapy and that's urge many centers around the world to investigate and research complementary medicine modalities more^[5]. Patients sometimes try to avoid discussing the usage of alternative therapies due to their fear from some negative responses or non-support from treating healthcare personnel's^[6]. General physicians and oncologists should be aware about the popular alternative medicine therapies and discuss them more frequently with patients.

REFERENCES

[1]. Cassileth, B.R., Vickers, A.J. High prevalence of complementary and alternative medicine use among

cancer patients: implications for research and clinical care. *J Clin Oncol.* 2005 Apr 20; 23(12):25903-2.
 [2]. Eisenberg, D.M., Davis, R.B., Ettner, S.L., Appels, Wilkeys, Van Rompay, M. Trends in alternative medicine in the US, 1990-1997: Results of a follow up national survey. *JAMA.* 1998 NOV 11; 280 (18):1569-73.
 [3]. Johnson, S.B., Park, H.S., Gross, C.P., Yu, J.B. Use of alternative medicine for cancer and its impact on survival. *J Natl. Cancer Inst.* 2018; 110:1.
 [4]. Munoz, J. and R Kurzrock. Targeted Therapy in Rare Cancers: Adopting the orphans. *Nat Rev Clin Oncol.* 2012; 9(11): 631-42.
 [5]. Cohen, L., Markman, M. *Integrative Oncology: Incorporating Complementary Medicine into Conventional cancer Car. Humana; Totowa, NJ: 2008.*
 [6]. Astin, J.A., Reilly, C., Perkins, C., Child, W.L. Breast cancer patients perspectives on and use of complementary and alternative medicine: a study from Susan G, Komen Breast Cancer Foundation. *J Soc Integr Oncol.* 2006 Fall; 4(4):157-69.