

Health Care Students' Attitudes, Knowledge and Use of Complementary and Alternative Medicine: A Cross Sectional Study

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Abstract : Background: In recent years, the use of Complementary Alternative Medicine (CAM) has achieved worldwide popularity. With the increased public interest in CAMs, attention to it within Health Care Schools and Colleges has also improved. Studies generally assess the knowledge and attitudes regarding CAMs in medical and nursing students. The current study focused on the knowledge, attitudes and practice of CAM in healthcare students. Aim: To assess the knowledge and attitudes regarding complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) in healthcare students in South Tyrol, a region in Northern Italy. Methodology: This cross-sectional study was carried out among 361 students. Self-administered questionnaire was adapted and modified by the researchers from several questionnaires. The instrument consisted of three sections: 1) demographical characteristics (gender, place of residence and year of study); 2) general attitudes towards CAM, evaluated through 11 items using a Likert scale (agree, partly agree, partly disagree, disagree); 3) knowledge and use about any particular CAM practices (acupuncture, aromatherapy, creative therapies, diet/nutritional therapies, phytotherapy/herbal therapies, compresses, massage therapy, Ayurvedic therapy, Tibetan medicine, naturopathy, homeopathy, pet therapy, reflexology, therapeutic touch, chiropractic/osteopathy). Results: The sample consisted of 63 males and 297 females, 58% living in villages. 151 students (42%) were in the first year, 99 (27%) in the second and 106 (30%) in the third. Both men and women agreed with statements about the utility and benefits of CAMs. Women were significantly more likely than men to agree that the CAM practices should be included in the curriculum ($p < 0.004$), that the health professionals should be able to advice their patients about commonly used CAM methods ($p < 0.002$) and that the clinical care should integrate CAM practices ($p < 0.04$). Students in the second year showed the highest mean score for the statement 'CAM includes ideas and methods from which conventional medicine could benefit' ($p = 0.049$), highlighting a positive attitude, while students in the third year achieved the lowest mean score for the negative statement 'The results of CAM are in most cases due to a placebo effect'. Regarding this statement, participants living in villages disagreed significantly than students living in the city ($p < 0.001$). Females appeared to be significantly more familiar with homeopathy ($p < 0.002$), aromatherapy ($p < 0.033$), creative therapies ($p < 0.001$) and herbal therapies ($p < 0.002$) than males. Moreover, women were likely to use CAM more frequently than men, particularly to solve psychological problems ($p < 0.004$). In addition, women perceived the benefit significantly more positive than men ($p < 0.001$). Students in the second year revealed to use the CAM mostly to improve the quality of life ($p < 0.023$), while students in the third year used CAMs particularly for chronic diseases ($p < 0.001$). Conclusions: Results from this study suggested that female students show more positive attitudes on CAM than male students. Moreover, the prevalence of CAM use and its perceived benefits differ between males and females, so that women are more willing to use CAM practices.

Keywords : attitude, CAM, complementary and alternative medicine, healthcare students, knowledge

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