



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Community Medicine

“COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE WITH SPIRITUALITY AS HOLISTIC APPROACH: WHAT CANCER PATIENTS THINK?”

KEY WORDS: Alternative Therapy; Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM); Conventional Medicine; Holistic Approach.

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Holistic medicine leads towards optimal attainment of the physical, mental emotional, social and spiritual aspects of health and lifestyle values. With growing incidence of cancer, it is of prime interest to study views of cancer patients regarding spirituality and holistic approach of cancer cure. **Objectives:** To explore opinions of cancer patients regarding spirituality, complementary and alternative Medicine (CAM) and holistic approach and its interrelationships with other factors. **Methods:** Results of present study are based on detailed findings under ICMR sponsored project “Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) Use among Cancer Patients”. As part of project, views of cancer patients regarding CAM use, holistic medicine, perceptions and beliefs regarding spirituality were explored by interview method. **Results:** The most common argument in favor of CAM was being close to nature (64.3%) followed by no side effects (63.0%). Spirituality as a CAM method was ranked at 1st place by 21.1% patients. About 82% patients were having faith in spirituality as CAM though 65% of them were not having any spiritual guru. Faith in God of 68% patients was increased and 25.6% patients expressed anger towards God after suffering from the disease. Being peaceful and calm were the most preferred characteristics. **Conclusions:** The findings of the present study support the role of spirituality as CAM in cancer cure. Felt need expressing indirect preferences to holistic approach was felt by patients. More in depth studies are required to ascertain the casual relationship.

INTRODUCTION:

In recent years, there is an alarming increase in incidence of cancer in these states in both rural and urban communities. Use of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) by cancer patients has also increased with growing incidence. Most people who use CAM do so in addition to, rather than in place of conventional medical treatment.^{1,2} Use of alternate and herbal therapy use is growing exponentially.³ There is a broad range of interacting positive and negative motivations concerning CAM found in the literature.⁴ Exact reasons for the popularity of CAM are complex, varying with time, space and also from therapy to therapy.⁵ Prevalence of CAM use among patients with diabetes was found to be 67.7% in an Indian community.⁶ A study of CAM use in patients with cancer found that 69 percent of cancer patients had used at least one CAM therapy as part of their cancer treatment.⁷ Use of different CAM therapies including spiritual healing by cancer patients is discussed in our earlier studies.^{8,9,10,11,12} Holistic medicine leads towards optimal attainment of the physical, mental emotional, social and spiritual aspects of health and lifestyle values. It emphasizes the connection of mind, body, and spirit. Spiritual dimension of health is the perceived need of the patients and should be given priority. Our earlier study conducted in the north Indian city of Chandigarh observed 62% among health personnel agreed to the existence of a spiritual dimension to health.¹³ The concept of spirituality is found in all cultures and societies. Over the past decade there has been a world-wide recognition that spirituality and health are closely related and still neglected factor in the health of patients.^{14,15,16,17,18,19,20} With growing incidence of cancer, it is of prime interest to study views of cancer patients regarding spirituality and holistic approach of cancer cure. Therefore, present study was conducted to explore opinions of cancer patients regarding spirituality, complementary and alternative Medicine (CAM) and holistic approach and its interrelationships with other factors.

MATERIAL AND METHODS:

Results are based on a hospital-based cross sectional survey conducted among cancer patients under Indian Council of

Medical Research (ICMR), India sponsored project “Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) Use Among Cancer Patients” Undertaken during June 2012 to May 2014 (IRIS Cell ID: 2011-S09910). The study was conducted among patients attending Radiation Oncology OPD of Government Medical College and Hospital (GMCH), a tertiary healthcare facility in Chandigarh (UT), North India during June 2012 to May 2014. Radiation Oncology Department of GMCH Chandigarh is well equipped and treating different cancer patients. Chandigarh is a highly urbanized city and western culture is adopted by a large proportion of respondents in this modern city called “City Beautiful of India”. Here the pattern of cancer may vary considerably as compared to remaining part of India. Government Medical College and Hospital (GMCH) Chandigarh provides care to patients representing several states. Oncology Department of GMCH is well equipped and treating different cancer patients.

Study Design:

Present hospital-based cross-sectional study design was adopted among patients of different types of cancer at different stages approaching for allopathic treatment at the health facility.

Sampling Design:

A systematic sampling design was adopted to select patients attending the radiation oncology OPD of the health facility during June 2012 to May 2014 to explore opinions of cancer patients regarding spirituality. Patients undergoing the OPD / their family members/close relatives attending the health facility were interviewed to collect information on personal and family characteristics, holistic approach, spiritual aspects, perceptions, beliefs and practices related with role of spiritual care in cancer cure and other relevant information. Patients revisiting the OPD were excluded while selecting the sample.

Information Collected/study Variables:

Patients suffering from cancer were interviewed to collect

desired information using semi-structured interview schedule. In case patients were not in the condition of giving information due to any reason, their family members/close relatives accompanying them served as respondents. Information regarding personal and family characteristics, beliefs and practices related with CAM, spirituality and holistic approach, sources of CAM awareness, perceived reliefs/benefits of CAM use, and positive and negative motivations concerning CAM was collected in privacy. Information was pretested and suitably modified through a pilot study. Questionnaires/schedules were filed by interview method asking questions in local/understandable language. Information was pretested and suitably modified through a pilot study. Both quantitative and qualitative surveys were conducted.

Inclusion Criterion:

Patients with confirmed diagnosis of any type of cancer irrespective of age, gender, site and staging of cancer approaching for allopathic treatment at the studied health facility for the first time willing to participate in the study were included.

Exclusion Criterion:

Patients not undergoing allopathic treatment for cancer at the health facility or not willing to participate in the study due to any reason were excluded.

Outcomes:

Primary outcome measure for this study was opinions of patients regarding holistic approach involving CAM and spirituality.

Optimum Sample Size

Power analysis was done to calculate optimum sample size for the proposed study. Sample size was calculated by using the following formula with approximation for large population:

$$n_{opt.} = \frac{Z^2_{1-\alpha/2} (1-P)}{\epsilon^2 P}$$

Where,
 P = anticipated population proportion
 1- α = confidence coefficient
 ε = relative precision, and
 Z(.) is the value of standard normal variate

On the basis of 60% CAM use as primary outcome parameter anticipated on the basis of a pilot survey findings and assuming 95% confidence coefficient and 5% relative precision, optimum sample size of 1,024 cancer patients was obtained. This study covered a sample of 1,117 cancer patients.

Ethical Issues

Only participants giving consent were included and Ethical Guidelines of ICMR (2007) on human participants were strictly followed. A written informed consent was taken from the patients. Prior approval from Institutional Ethics Committee was taken for conducting the study.

Statistical Methods

Content analysis of opinions was carried out. Some elementary statistical methods including normal test of proportions and Chi-square (χ²) test were applied to carry out for comparisons of opinions expressed in percentages and their associations with characteristics of patients. Data analysis was carried out using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS)-16 software.

RESULTS:

Among all 1117 cancer patients surveyed including 501 males and 616 females, 432 (38.7%) were using different CAM

therapies. The most common CAM therapy in use was found to be Ayurvedic treatment reported by 187(43.3%) patients followed by Yoga. Among males, Ayurveda was the most commonly used CAM therapy (18.8%) followed by spiritual therapy (12.6%) and yoga/meditation (11.6%). Among females, these therapies were used by 15.5%, 13.1% and 13.1% patients respectively.

Respondents gave various views regarding the existence of God (Table-1) like “with God’s blessings we can improve our health” reported by 271(24.3%) respondents and “God is helpful in every problem” reported by 205(18.4%) respondents. God and doctor equally treated 191(17.1%), it gives power, strength and motivation to live life 95(8.5%), prayers can improve health 53(4.7%), depends on our karma-dharma 51(4.6%), God can recover us with his Omni presence 31(2.8%), doctors can do treatment but God can do miracles 28(2.5%), God gives us different hurdles so that we can learn to deal with them 12(1.1%), God gives right direction to choose right direction and meditation can relax our mind 17(1.5%) and it gives psychologically positive attitude 9(0.8%).

Table-1: Opinion Of Respondents About Existence Of God In Improving Ill Health

Opinion	No (N=1117)	%
When we pray to God our health improves	62	5.6
God is helpful in every problem	205	18.4
God is not helpful	21	1.9
God and Doctors are same for us.	191	17.1
With God’s blessings we can improve our health	271	24.3
It gives psychologically positive attitude	09	0.8
It gives power, Strength and motivation to live life	95	8.5
All depends upon our karma	51	4.6
Doctors can do treatment but God can do miracles	28	2.5
Meditation can relax our mind	11	0.9
God is Last Hope	11	0.9
God is Omni present and only he can recover us	31	2.8
God gives us right direction to choose doctors	17	1.5
God gives us different hurdles so that we should learn to deal with it.	12	1.1
Don’t Know	51	4.6
No Response	49	4.4

Respondents gave varied opinions regarding meaning of Holistic approach as shown in Table 2. The most common opinion came out to be “Spiritual aspect should also be taken into account when assessing a person’s overall well-being” as reported by 653(58.5%) respondents followed by “emotional and spiritual care” as reported by 276(24.7%) respondents.

Regarding spiritual health, respondents gave various views (Table- 5) like one who takes God name, falls less sick reported by 156(13.9%), “It’s a cycle of Karma. Whatever happens, it has to happen and it is because of our earlier deeds” 65(5.8%), People who believes in God don’t fall sick more often reported by 46(4.1%), people who believes in God are psychologically more healthy : 28(2.5%), Good people who completes his/ her duties on time considered as spiritual person : 21(1.9%), one who completely believes in God : 20(1.8%), spiritual health connects mind and body, creates balance between both : 15(1.3%), Internally healthy : 14(1.3%), mentally healthy person is spiritually healthy person: 15(1.3%), calm and peaceful person is a spiritual person : 12 (1.1%), helping nature : 11(1.0%), related to meditation : 11(0.9%), related to spirit, soul : 9 (0.8%), Peace at

heart, strong will power :9(0.8%) and Peace at heart is called spiritual health : 8(0.7%). There were 394 (35.3%) respondents who were ignorant of spiritual health. Among all patients surveyed, 423 (37.9%) were of the opinion that there is some interrelationship between spirituality and health.

Table-2: Holistic Approach For Curing Disease

Opinion of respondents regarding Holistic approach	Male N=501		Female N=616		Total N=1117	
	No.	%	No	%	No.	%
A concept in medical practice upholding that all aspects of people's needs, psychological, physical and social should be taken in account and seen as a whole	4	0.8	7	1.1	11	1.0
Disease is a result of physical, emotional, spiritual, social and environmental imbalance, is used	29	5.8	21	3.4	50	4.5
Spiritual aspect should also be taken into account when assessing a person's overall well-being	284	56.7	369	59.9	653	58.5
Recognizes that our discomforts or pains are merely symptoms of an imbalance. The imbalance could be a physical issue, or the imbalance may be the result of mental, emotional, or spiritual, needs not being met	6	1.2	9	1.5	15	1.3
No aspect (mind, body, spirit, or emotions) of a person is overlooked when an holistic treatment is sought	25	5.0	15	2.4	40	3.6
The holistic healer looks at the "whole person" in order to make his or her complete evaluation and uses all information gathered before suggested treatment to the client are offered.	3	0.6	1	0.2	04	0.4
Holistic medicine focuses on how the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual elements of the body are interconnected to maintain wellness, or holistic health.	21	4.2	31	5.0	52	4.7
Holistic approach focus on the whole person rather than just on the illness or part of the body that is not healthy.	17	3.4	22	3.6	52	4.7
Reflect a focus on a person's overall health, a focus that includes prevention, rehabilitation, and other approaches, rather than illness alone.	15	3.0	19	3.1	34	3.0
It includes emotional and spiritual care.	134	26.7	142	23.1	276	24.7
Others	44		43		87	

Table-3: Opinion Of Respondents Regarding Spiritual Health

Opinion	No (N=1117)	%
People who believe in God are psychological more healthy	28	2.5
People who believe in God don't fall sick more often	46	4.1

Positive outlook towards life are spiritually healthy	21	1.9
One who takes Gods name, falls less sick	156	13.9
Peace at heart is called spiritual health	09	0.8
Strong will power	08	0.7
Internally Healthy	14	1.3
Tension Free	04	0.4
Related to spirit, soul	09	0.8
Spiritual Health connects mind and body, creates balance between both.	15	1.3
Good Person(Completes his/her duties on time) is considered as spiritual healthy person	21	1.9
Calm and peaceful person is a spiritual person	12	1.1
It's a cycle of 'Karma'. Whatever happens, because of our earlier deeds.	65	5.8
Related to meditation	11	0.9
Mentally Healthy Person is spiritual healthy person	15	1.3
Spiritually healthy person deals better with illness, disease or with death	04	0.4
Believes in 'Bhrama Kumaries'(Attached to super soul)	02	0.2
Who completely believes in God	20	1.8
Helping Nature	11	0.9
Responsible towards his/ her duties	01	0.1
Ultimate eternal peace(connecting with the divine power)	03	0.3
Physical fitness	03	0.3
Confused about spiritual health	01	0.1
No Response	67	5.9
Don't Know	394	35.3
Who is Spiritual Mentor		
No one	727	65.1
Spiritual leaders/Gurus	279	25.0
Others	111	9.9
Components of healing process (N=390)		
Prayers	198	50.8
Psycho Counseling	04	1.0
Meditation	136	34.9
Imaging & visualization	05	1.3
Breathing techniques	09	2.3
Inspirational or sacred readings	04	1.0
Epic storytelling	03	0.8
Listening to spiritual music	44	11.3
Guided imaginary	03	0.8
Meditation with visualization	09	2.3
Spiritual time nature	107	27.4
Visiting religious places	44	11.3

There were 727 (65.1%) respondents who didn't have any spiritual guru (Table-6). Components of healing process that were undertaken by spiritual gurus for seeking cure of the disease were prayers: 198(50.8%), meditation: 136 (34.9%), spiritual time nature: 107(27.4%). Majority (77.3%) of patients were of the opinion that people turn to spirituality mainly during serious illness or when wishes were fulfilled (12.2%). Spirituality plays an important perceived role in improving health.

DISCUSSION:

It is important to study perceptions of cancer patients regarding spirituality a CAM in practice as a dimension of health for holistic care of cancer patients. Present study explored opinions of cancer patients regarding spirituality, complementary and alternative Medicine (CAM) and holistic approach and its interrelationships with other factors. Respondents ranked physical health at top (39.7%), mental health at second rank (32.8), spiritual health as rank third

(21.3%) followed by social health (3.7%). There is growing awareness that spirituality is an important yet often neglected factor in the health of patients.²¹ Various views were given regarding relationship among spirituality, health and culture. Maximum respondents (33.8%) were of the opinion that that these are not interrelated to each other. Our earlier study in the north Indian city of Chandigarh reported that 62% health personnel agreed to the existence of a spiritual dimension to health.¹⁴ There were (81.7%) respondents who thought that God/spirituality had role in recovering from their disease and (61.6%) respondents reported change in outlook on life after suffering from this disease. In the present survey, respondents gave varied opinions regarding meaning of holistic approach. The most common opinion came out to be "Spiritual aspect should also be taken into account when assessing a person's overall well-being" as reported by 58.5% respondents followed by "emotional and spiritual care" as reported by 24.7% respondents. As reported in the present survey, respondents turned to spirituality the most during serious illness or loss (77.3%), when wishes are fulfilled (12.2%), loose hope in other sources (7.5%) and when diseases get cured (2.4%). The most common opinion came out to be "Spiritual aspect should also be taken into account when assessing a person's overall well-being" as followed by "emotional and spiritual care". Patients gave varied opinions regarding meaning of holistic approach in this study. The most common opinion came out to be "Spiritual aspect should also be taken into account when assessing a person's overall well-being" as reported by 58.5% respondents followed by "emotional and spiritual care" as reported by 24.7% respondents. At the end of follow-up, the most common opinion came out to be "Spiritual aspect should also be taken into account when assessing a person's overall well-being" as reported by 65.7% respondents followed by "emotional and spiritual care" as reported by respondents 33.7%.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS:

The findings of the present study support the relationship between spirituality and health outcomes. It is concluded that spiritual dimension of health is very important and it should be given priority. Felt need of holistic care by patients was experienced as they had indirect preferences to this approach. Spiritual health care in medical practice should be introduced for effectively addressing the issues related with spirituality and health for holistic care of cancer patients. Spiritual healing may be made an integral part in health care delivery system for cancer management as a step ahead towards holistic approach to cancer management.

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Conflict Of Interest: None declared

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