

Pilot Study of Complementary and Alternative Medicine Use In Urban Primary Care Practices

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INTRODUCTION

Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) use has drastically increased in the United States. However, little is known about the prevalence of CAM use in urban and minority primary care practices settings. This pilot study explored patients' health management beliefs regarding usage of common CAM modalities.

OBJECTIVES

- 1) To estimate the prevalence of CAM use in adults 18 and over by self-report.
- 2) To identify CAM therapies and modalities used by minorities served in medically underserved areas to manage health.
- 3) To assess patient health management behavior regarding CAM use.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

- **Study design:** Cross-sectional
- **Instrument:** Survey of Consumer Use of CAM, AARP & NCCAM, 2006 conducted by in-person interview.
- **Participants:** Informed consent was obtained from adults age 18 and older at 9 primary care practice sites in the Washington Metropolitan Area.
- **Definition of terms:** CAM was defined by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM).

RESULTS

- Of the 168 participants, 111 (66%) reported CAM use within the past 12 months.
- Most CAM Users were 31-49 years of age (27(20.9)).
- Significant demographic variables were age, education, and income.
- Most prevalent CAM therapies used were Exercise (14%), Prayer (14%), Herbal Medicine (11%), Massage therapy (10%), and Relaxation therapy (8%).
- CAM use was most prevalent among patients managing back problems (13%), hypertension (12.3%) and headaches (9.7%).
- Participants most frequently use CAM for overall wellness (35%) and to prevent illness (25%).
- The primary sources of CAM information were radio/tv and the internet.
- Other activities reported that improve health: yoga, reflexology, relationships, meditation, focus factor, tai chi, flax seed oil, olive oil, herbal/natural products and lemon, 12 step groups, chewing gum for relaxation, reading self improvement books, participating in book clubs, and positive thinking (*data not shown*).

RESULTS

Table 1: Demographics of adults who use CAM N=168

Variable	Intervals	CAM Users n(%)	Non CAM Users n(%)
Age*	18-30 years	20(15.5)	14(10.9)
	31-49 years	27(20.9)	15(11.6)
	50-60 years	20(15.5)	7(5.4)
	61-79 years	18(14.0)	6(4.7)
	80+ years	1(8)	1(8)
Gender	Male	43(26.1)	24(14.5)
	Female	66(40.0)	32(19.4)
Race	White/Caucasian	3(1.8)	5(3.0)
	African Descent (Black, African American, Caribbean)	98(59.8)	45(27.4)
	Native American/Alaskan Native	2(1.2)	2(1.2)
	Hispanic Latino	1(6)	4(2.4)
	Asian/Pacific Islander	3(1.8)	0
	Other	1(6)	0
Marital Status	Single	47(28.1)	30(18.0)
	Married	36(21.6)	15(9.0)
	Widowed	10(6.0)	8(4.8)
	Separated/Divorced	17(10.2)	4(2.4)
Socioeconomic Status (SES)*	\$10,000 or less	13(9.2)	15(10.6)
	\$10,001-\$20,000	12(8.5)	7(4.9)
	\$20,001-\$30,000	18(12.7)	8(5.6)
	\$30,001-\$50,000	20(14.1)	9(6.3)
	\$50,001-\$100,000	21(14.8)	7(4.9)
	\$100,001 or more	11(7.7)	1(7)
Education*	Less than high school	7(4.2)	8(4.8)
	High school Diploma or Equivalent	34(20.4)	24(14.4)
	Some College or Technical School	26(15.6)	11(6.6)
	College Degree or Professional School	43(25.7)	14(8.4)
Born in US	Yes	82(49.1)	48(28.7)
	No	28(16.8)	9(34.1)

* Significant difference at p=.05

Average Annual Gross Income

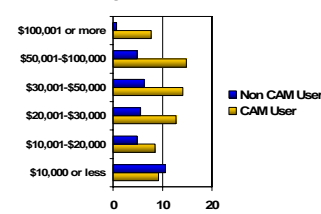


Fig. 1. The above chart indicates that CAM Users reported a higher annual gross income range compared to Non CAM Users (\$50,001-\$100,000).

Highest Level of Education Completed

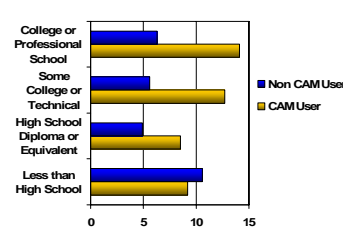


Fig. 2. The above chart indicates that most CAM Users completed college or professional school (14%).

Prevalence of CAM use in DC PrimCare PBRN

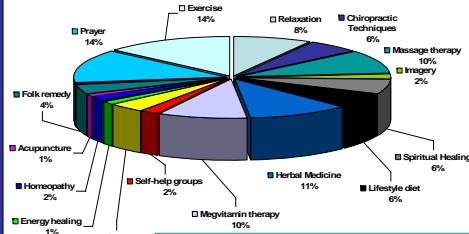


Fig. 3. The above chart indicates that the two most prevalent CAM therapies used are exercise and prayer (14%).

Table 2: Illnesses Treated by CAM

Variables	n(%)
Back problems	36(13.0)
Digestive problems	19(6.9)
Dizziness	7(2.5)
Headaches	27(9.7)
Allergies	19(6.9)
Hypertension	34(12.3)
Diabetes	12(4.3)
Cancer	8(2.9)
Asthma	8(2.9)
Arthritis	18(6.5)
Obesity	8(2.9)
Chronic pain	16(5.8)
Insomnia	11(4.0)
Sprains and Strains	17(6.1)
Depression	16(5.8)
Skin problems	7(2.5)
Urinary tract problems	5(1.8)

* Percent exceeds 100% due to multiple responses allowed

Reasons CAM Therapies Are Used

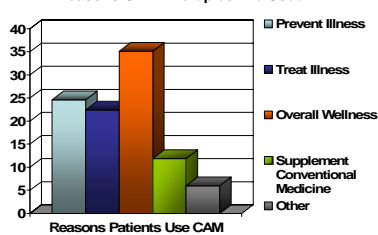


Fig. 4. The above graph indicates that CAM is most frequently used for overall wellness (35%) and to prevent illness (25%).

Primary Source for CAM Information

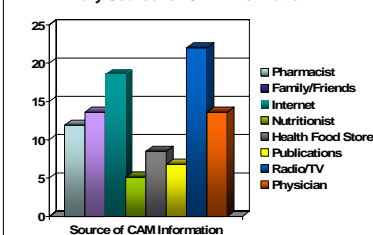


Fig. 5. The above graph indicates that the primary sources of CAM information are radio/tv (23%) and the internet (18.6%).

CONCLUSION

- Primary care providers should be aware of CAM use and health management practices of their patients.
- Chronic pain (back and headaches) are most frequently managed by CAM therapies.
- Consumers are accessing CAM information from other sources, primarily various forms of media, prior to speaking with health care providers.

PUBLIC HEALTH IMPLICATION

- Effective provider-patient communication is essential to addressing safety issues regarding use of CAM practices and their interactions with prescribed medications.
- Standards regarding CAM practices are warranted, especially concerning the credibility and accuracy of consumer health information.

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FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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