

Medical students' attitude about complementary and alternative medicine and its usage

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Introduction

The popularity of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) and its use have increased over the previous decades (Frass et al., 2012). The amount of available literature regarding the use of CAM in providing different types of health care is increasing (Bazargan et al., 2008; Rosenberg et al., 2008).

The National Center for CAM (NCCAM, 2008) defines CAM as “a group of diverse medical and health care systems, practices, and products that are not generally considered part of conventional medicine”. The most commonly investigated CAM modalities among university students were biologically based modalities (which include herbals) and mind-body medicine modalities (which include meditation, spiritualities, hypnosis and yoga) (Loh et al., 2013).

There have been a rising number of studies investigating medical students' knowledge and attitude regarding CAM in recent years. Two studies from Saudi Arabia (Albadr et al., 2018; Alzahrani et al., 2016) that assessed knowledge and attitude regarding CAM among medical students, found gap in knowledge, despite their positive attitude towards the topic. Another study conducted at two universities in the United States reported that medical stu-

dents received the least amount of education about CAM and doubted the usefulness of CAM the most, among all health professions students (Baugniet et al., 2000).

Data on knowledge and attitude of medical students from developing countries about CAM are limited. In Serbia, there is still lack of data. Therefore, the aim of this study is to assess the attitude towards CAM and its use among medical students at the University of Pristina in Kosovska Mitrovica. The Medical Faculty of the University of Pristina in Kosovska Mitrovica is one of the five state medical faculties in Serbia. Currently, CAM is not part of the study curriculum, so the second goal of this study is to assess students' attitude toward its inclusion into the medical curriculum.

Materials and methods

This cross-sectional study recruited medical students on 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th year of study during the academic 2019-2020 year. These study groups were chosen because they are in contact with patients that are interested in the effectiveness of this kind of treatment. The study was approved by the Ethical Committee of the Faculty of Medicine.

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Out of total 337 filled questionnaires, 45 were excluded from the study because of incomplete data.

The first part of the questionnaire assessed the socio-demographic characteristics of students (age, gender, year of education). The second part of the questionnaire assessed the use of CAM, and the third part assessed the attitude towards CAM. The attitude was assessed using 7 questions with dichotomous yes or no answers.

Procedures of CAM examined in this study were: acupuncture, massage, hypnosis, herbal medicine, meditation, homeopathy, chiropractic, yoga, reflexology, prayer and self-help groups.

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze investigated parameters.

Results and discussion

Among the 292 students who completed the questionnaire, 74 (25%), 64 (22%), 91 (31%), and 63 (22%) were in the third, fourth, fifth and sixth years of study, respectively.

The percentage of students that currently use CAM was 17.5%, while 33% had never used CAM. Massage therapy (39%), herbal products (24%), prayer (13.7%) and meditation (11.3%) were most common used procedures of CAM. The most common reasons for using CAM among medical students were improvement of general health, exam stress relief and improvement of concentration.

The most popular sources of information about CAM was internet (74%).

Interestingly, despite the fact that most of the students believe that CAM could be used to improve general health and alleviate or eliminate the symptoms of the disease, over 50% of students are unsure about their effectiveness and safety.

Majority of the students (75%) felt that knowledge about CAM could be beneficial to their medical practice and should be included in the medical curriculum.

Conclusion

Our results showed medical students positive attitude about CAM regardless of their insufficient knowledge of this topic. A high percentage of students agreed that CAM can be useful in the prevention and treatment of various medical conditions.

Finally, the students showed significant interest for including of CAM concept in the medical curriculum.

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