

Cypriot nurses' knowledge and attitudes towards alternative medicine



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A B S T R A C T

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Purpose: To investigate Cypriot nurses' knowledge and attitude towards alternative treatments.

Methods: Two hundred randomly selected registered Nurses from public hospitals in Cyprus were administered an anonymous self-report questionnaire with closed-type questions. The particular questionnaire has previously been used in similar surveys. Six questions referred to demographic data and 14 questions to attitudes and knowledge towards alternative medicine. One hundred and thirty-eight questionnaires were adequately completed and evaluated. Descriptive and inferential statistics was performed. SPSS 17.0 was used. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

Results: Over 1/3 of our sample nurses reported that they had turned to some form of alternative treatment at some point in their lives in order to deal with a certain medical situation. Most of these nurses who reported some knowledge on specific alternative treatment methods, (75.9%) also reported using such methods within their clinical practice. The nurses who had received some form of alternative treatment reported using them more often in their clinical practice, in comparison to those who had never received such treatment (Mann–Whitney $U = 1137$, $p = 0.006$). The more frequently nurses used alternative treatment in their clinical practice, the more interested they got in expanding their knowledge on the subject (Pearson's $r = 0.250$, $p = 0.006$).

Conclusion: Most nurses are familiar with alternative medicine and interested in expanding their knowledge on subject, despite the fact that they do not usually practice it. Special education and training as well as legislative actions are necessary for alternative medicine to be broadly accepted.

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1. Introduction

Complementary and alternative treatments have spread worldwide, and their implementation has increased during the last 10–15 years among the general population [1]. A research in the USA, using phone interviews, found that 67.6% of the 2055 participants, who responded, had used, at least once, a complementary or alternative form of treatment [2]. Engebrston identified some of the reasons complementary and alternative treatment have such broad appeal [3]. Nowadays, technological and scientific data and research are widely available and accessible to the public. People believe that technologically supported treatment possibilities are

limited and have turned towards forms of treatment which focus on human contact and holism. As De Keyser et al. report, the modern patient is aware of his rights, and more specifically the right to consent and choice of treatment regimens [4]. This led to the patients making use of that right and seeking out treatment which would provide a feeling of increased well-being. Richardson et al., add that patients, in addition to trying to control the course of the disease and the treatment regimen, they also use complementary and alternative treatment in an effort to boost the feeling of hope towards a favorable disease outcome. Last but not least, most of the available alternative treatments have either limited or no side effects at all, due to their non-toxicity [5].

In recent years, complementary and alternative medicine is often blended and integrated with conventional medicine. An increase in the usage of complementary and alternative medicine by

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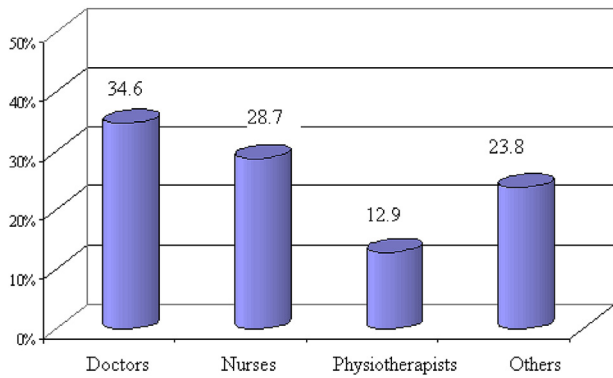


Fig. 1. Source of information about complementary and alternative medicine.

both nurses and patients, has spawned further investigation [6]. Studies thus far commonly focus on physicians' attitudes and practice patterns in this regard. Despite the large amount of time that nurses share with their patients and the unique nurse–patient relationship, little research has explored the nurse's attitudes and practice regarding complementary and alternative medicine. Rankin & Box suggested that nurses interested in practicing alternative medicine should be appropriately trained, in order to understand each patient's individuality and in which case scenario should or should not be used a particular complementary and alternative treatment [7].

There seems to be no related legislation regarding the field of complementary and alternative treatment in Cyprus and their establishment as practices with real clinical applications. Which as a result there no guidelines as to who should be responsible for their implementation, and under which authority they would act. This leads to the formation of two opposite sides; one that supports the clinical use of these therapies, and one that supports their use as part of an independent profession, differentiated from health professions. These two opposing sides are debating about the issue, trying to identify the boundaries of the field of Complementary and Alternative Medicine. There are various alternative treatments used in Cyprus, but the apparent lack of an efficient recording authority, as well as a uniform professional association, creates a huge problem in identifying and counting these forms of treatment.

In this context, the study aims to investigate Cypriot nurses' knowledge and attitude regarding alternative treatments.

2. Materials and methods

The study sample consisted of 138 registered Nurses from public hospitals in Cyprus. The method used was convenience sampling and an anonymous self-completion questionnaire was used as a survey tool. The ward selection, for questionnaire distribution, was based on simple random sampling. The questionnaire was based on one used and calibrated in Israel by Freda G. De Keyser, Bella Bar Cohen and Nurit Wagner, who investigated the knowledge and attitude levels of nurses towards alternative treatment. At the same time, bibliographic research was conducted utilizing the Medline, Cinahl, Scopus and Scholar databases. Thus, the tool for our population sample was appropriately developed. The first 6 questions referred to the participants' demographic data. The next 14 questions, aimed to reveal the sample's attitudes and knowledge.

3. Statistics

Descriptive and inferential statistics were performed. Parametric (*t*-test) and non-parametric tests (Mann–Whitney, χ^2 ,

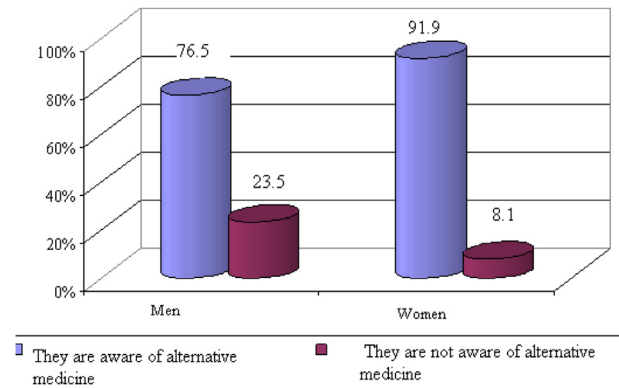


Fig. 2. Male and female nurses' knowledge about CAM.

Fischer exact test) were used where appropriate, while the Pearson test was applied for data correlation. Statistical significance was set at *p* = 0.05. SPSS 17.0 was used for statistical purposes.

4. Results

The majority of the participants were females (*n* = 87, 63%). The average age of the participants was approximately 35 years (34.97 ± 11.29 years), while female nurses were significantly older than their male counterparts (37.97 ± 12.04 vs 30.51 ± 8.22 years respectively [$t(132.784) = -4.092, p < 0.001$]). Eighty eight percent of the nurses reported that they did have some knowledge on alternative treatment, whereas only 48.6% of them could name a specific alternative treatment method. Information about alternative medicine was acquired from nurses' studies and other health professionals by 55.6% of the respondents aware of alternative medicine (Fig. 1). Females were more informed about complementary and alternative medicine, as 91.9% had some knowledge of CAM in comparison with 76.5% of males (Fisher's exact test *p* < 0.05-Fig.2). About 30% of our sample reported that they had turned to some form of alternative treatment at some point in their lives in order to deal with a certain medical situation. As shown in Fig. 3, 45.8% of the nurses do not use such methods in clinical practice and only 12.7% of them apply them often, or very often. Cypriot nurses showed medium to high interest in expanding their knowledge on the subject, as 71.4% of nurses stated that they were much, or very much interested in alternative therapies (Fig.4). Doctors more frequently than nurses applied alternative therapies, according to sample's opinion (34.6% as compared to 28.7%). Ninety three percent of the respondents felt that scientific evidence is an absolute requirement for the use of such treatments. 74.0% of the nurses stated that the positive responses to alternative treatment cannot be attributed solely to the placebo effect. Regarding the

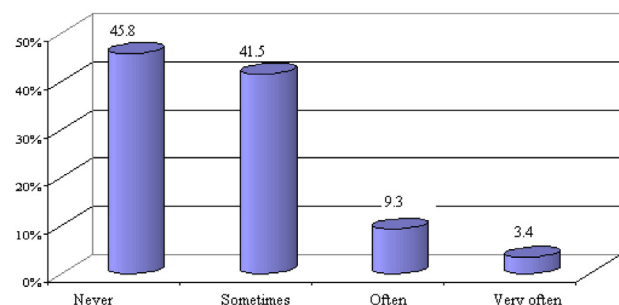


Fig. 3. Frequency of CAM practice among participants.

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