



Perceptions of professional nurses towards complementary and alternative modalities (CAM) in the uMgungundlovu District, KwaZulu-Natal



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 11 February 2017

Received in revised form 13 June 2017

Accepted 13 June 2017

Available online 15 June 2017

Keywords:

Alternative therapies

Complementary modalities

Homeopathy

Manipulative body based practices

Mind and body medicine

ABSTRACT

Globally, the use of alternative therapies by both the public and healthcare workers has escalated. Due to the popularity and frequent use, the need for identifying the perceptions of professional nurses regarding alternative therapies was vital. In South Africa, research on alternative therapies within a nursing context is still in infancy. Empirical work undertaken internationally has led to renewed interest in this topic, which has resulted in its benefits being increasingly documented.

A quantitative exploratory research approach was used in this study. A total of 616 questionnaires were distributed across nine participating hospitals, and a 63% of the target population responded. Arrangements were made with the management of each institution with regards to convenient days and times to make contact with the professional nurses. The findings of the study revealed that professional nurses did make use of various forms of alternative therapies. Prayer/spirituality (69%; $n = 265$), nutritional supplements 59% ($n = 207$) and music therapy 51% ($n = 199$) were the most frequently used alternative therapies. About 57.9% ($n = 204$) of the nurses were satisfied with the information received in nursing education with regards to support groups in nursing care; prayer/spirituality; nutritional supplements; music therapy and massage therapy. The findings further showed that 70.6% ($n = 272$) thought that alternative therapies were beneficial rather than a threat to patient's health. Although 66.1% ($n = 254$) of professional nurses encountered patients who enquired about alternative therapies, only 39.6% ($n = 153$) expressed confidence in advising patients about these therapies.

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1. Introduction and background

Mariano (2007: 59) defines complementary and alternative modalities (CAM) as “a broad set of healthcare practices, therapies and modalities that address the whole person-body, mind, emotion, spirit and environment and not just signs and symptoms. CAM can replace or may be used to complement conventional medical, surgical and pharmacological treatments.” Complementary and alternative therapies (CAT) include many healing approaches and therapies that were founded from around the world. Various aspects of CAM are rooted in the ancient systems of healing, found in China, India, Tibet, Africa and America (Varghese, Koshy, Mary, Silvipriya, & Resmi, 2010: 2).

According to Mariano (2007: 63), holism in health care and nursing is a philosophy that evolved directly from Florence Nightingale, who believed in care that concentrated on unity, wellness and the interrelationship of human beings, events and the environment. The terms ‘holism’ and ‘holistic’ comes from the Greek word meaning all, whole, entire, total. Papathanassiou, Sklavo, and Kourkouta (2013: 1) state that holistic therapies dealt with human beings as a whole, whereby a multi-faceted approach to health and disease is adopted. CAT includes many healing approaches and therapies.

The National Centre for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (2012) has grouped alternative therapies into the following broad categories:

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1.1. Natural products – herbal and nutritional supplements

These therapies are extracted from nature and include herbs, vitamins and mineral as well as probiotics. They are widely marketed, readily available to consumers and are often sold as dietary supplements.

1.2. Mind and body medicine – meditation, acupuncture, relaxation techniques, therapeutic touch, prayer/spiritual healing, music therapy and support groups

A large number of ancient cultures believe that the mind is a powerful tool and has a significant influence on the body. These therapies make use of different techniques to enhance the mind's ability to have an impact on the functioning of the body as well as symptoms experienced by the patient.

1.3. Manipulative and body-based practices – massage therapy and aromatherapy

Massage therapy includes many different techniques in which practitioners manually manipulate the soft tissue of the body. Aromatherapy is the use of various oils which are externally applied and inhaled and is sometimes used together with massage therapy.

In South Africa, CAT is governed by the Allied Health Professionals Council of South Africa (AHPSCSA). Approximately 3600 complementary and alternative medical practitioners and therapists were registered with the AHPSCSA in 2007, these practitioners / therapists may or may not have a medical degree. Included in this register are nurse practitioners who are qualified to treat certain medical conditions without the direct supervision of a doctor. Initially, ten CATs were allowed by the Allied Health Professionals Act, which included: osteopathy, chiropractic, homeopathy, naturopathy and three therapeutic professions namely aromatherapy, massage therapy and reflexology (Gqaleni, Moodley, Kruger, Ntuli, & Mcloed, 2007: 178).

Several studies have shown that patients are more aware of the importance of their health and are making concerted efforts to prevent illness and promote their health and well-being (Amichai, Grossman, & Richard, 2012; Cehousky, 2002; Zoe et al., 2014). Patients often explore healthcare remedies, which integrate CAT with conventional medical approaches (Naicker, 2008; Thorvaldsen, 2007). Health care workers in South Africa have argued that there is a degree of ignorance about CAT, and that varied opinions with regards to its application and efficacy exists among the general public. However, very little empirical evidence exists in South Africa to substantiate this notion (Small, 2004: 1).

Many studies related to nursing education suggests that faculty development programs are needed in order to ensure that information regarding alternative therapies is integrated into nursing curricula (Avino, 2011; Fenton & Morris, 2003; Kim, Erlen, Kim, & Sok, 2006). Moore (2010: 612) reviewed the rationale for CAT in nursing school curricula. She stated that with the increase in the popularity and use of CAT, nurses should be able to assess safety issues related to it and that the foundation for CAT is best established in nursing school training. Current nursing colleges and schools are basically providing an overview to CAT, although more in-depth knowledge is required to prepare nursing staff for the huge demand of CAT by the public. Due to the lack of formal lectures regarding these therapies, nurses are not prepared to answer questions or interpret data about CAT for their patients' and this places them in a predicament.

For the purpose of this study, the knowledge and perceptions of nurses on the following alternative therapies were explored; (1) Natural products – like herbal and nutritional supplements, (2) Mind and body medicine – for example meditation, acupuncture,

relaxation techniques, therapeutic touch, prayer/spiritual healing, music therapy and support groups, (3) Manipulative body based practices – for example massage therapy and aromatherapy. These forms of CAT were chosen as a number of these therapies are approved by the Allied Health Professionals Council of South Africa (AHPSCSA) (Gqaleni et al., 2007: 178).

2. Problem statement

The integration of CAT into professional nursing practice is evident (Buchan, Shakeel, Trinidad, Buchan, & Ah-See, 2012; Taylor & Blackwell, 2010; Trail-Mahan, Mao, & Bawel-Brinkley, 2013), yet little has been done to infuse this area into nursing practice and education. This made it necessary to identify nurses' knowledge, perceptions and beliefs regarding the use and efficacy of CAT in order to facilitate the integration of these therapies into nursing practice. This was reiterated by Trail-Mahan et al. (2013: 277), who reported that it was important to establish nurses' knowledge and beliefs about CAT, in order to include relevant educational components of CAT into the nursing curricula. This will also assist to eliminate the barriers to incorporating CAT into the acute nursing setting, as evidence shows that the use of CAT by patients' is high, yet the knowledge of nurses' are limited (Burman, 2003; Chu & Wallis, 2006).

The determination of the perceptions of professional nurses towards alternative therapies, contributes to enhanced patient care, as nurses will be in a better position to understand the extent and benefits of these interventions within the context of clinical care. It will also contribute to determining their level of knowledge regarding the entire continuum of alternative therapies and the barriers that they are faced with in providing advice regarding alternative therapies in nursing care.

3. Significance of the study

CAT has become increasingly popular amongst the general population globally (Chu & Wallis, 2006; Erci, 2007; Hasan et al., 2011; Yom & Lee, 2008). With the obvious increase in patient use of CAT, it is imperative that patients are able to receive accurate information regarding these therapies. Nurses are one of the largest groups of health care workers that patients have constant contact with, when in hospital and at primary health care level. It is therefore, important that nurses are well informed regarding CAT (Burman, 2003; Chu & Wallis, 2006).

This is the first study in nursing to explore the perceptions of professional nurses towards alternative therapies within the uMgungundlovu District in South Africa. As such it will shed valuable light on nurses' perceptions and views regarding its integration into nursing education. It will also highlight potential strategies to deal with aspects of CAT, when patients using alternative therapies are encountered in the clinical nursing environment.

4. Aim of the study

The aim of the study was to determine the perceptions of professional nurses at nine hospitals within the uMgungundlovu District, Kwazulu Natal, towards complementary and alternative modalities within a nursing context.

5. Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study were to:

- Determine professional nurse's level of knowledge of complementary and alternative therapies.

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