

• Research Article

Complementary and alternative medicine practices, traditional healing practices, and cultural competency in pediatric oncology in Hawai'i

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ABSTRACT

OBJECTIVE: Hawai'i is an ethnically diverse island state with a high rate of both traditional healing (TH) and complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) use. The aim of this project was to assess TH and CAM use within the pediatric oncology population in Honolulu and improve the delivery of culturally competent care.

METHODS: A 9-item survey was distributed to all pediatric oncology patients at Kapi'olani Medical Center for Women and Children for 3 months. The survey inquired about patient ethnicity, TH practices, CAM practices and perception of cultural competence of the care received. Descriptive statistics were calculated for the survey items. Qualitative analysis was done with participant comments to identify themes.

RESULTS: Sixty-two surveys were completed. TH was used by 39% of the respondents in the home, and 10% in the hospital (top method was traditional foods). CAM was used by 27% of the respondents in the home, and 68% in the hospital (top method was healing touch). Ninety-seven percent of the respondents reported receiving culturally competent care. Areas for improvement included language services and dietary choices.

CONCLUSION: CAM and TH are used frequently by pediatric oncology patients in Hawai'i, and the vast majority of patients and families felt that the care they received was culturally competent.

Keywords: cultural competency; medicine, complementary and alternative; traditional healing; ethnicity; pediatric, cancer

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1 Introduction

Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) is a term

that describes healing methods that have not generally been part of conventional Western medicine^[1]. “Complementary” refers to treatments that integrate with (complement)

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conventional treatments, and “alternative” refers to those treatments that replace conventional treatments. In general usage in the United States today, the term CAM is mostly used in the former sense. Integrative medicine is a term that is used to describe the combination of conventional therapies with CAM therapies for which there is some high quality scientific evidence of safety and effectiveness^[2].

Traditional healing (TH) is defined as “the sum total of knowledge, skills, and practices based on the theories, beliefs and experiences indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health, as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illness”^[3] and continues to be used globally. CAM and TH methods do not typically undergo the rigorous research process that conventional treatments do prior to implementation. Despite this, CAM and TH use is on the rise in Western cultures as patients and families look for more natural healing methods.

Hawai’i is an ethnically diverse island state with a high rate of both TH and CAM use^[4]. As the major urban center for the Pacific Basin, Honolulu is the location for pediatric oncologic treatment for children from a wide array of cultural and socio-demographic backgrounds. In addition to the stress of caring for a youngster with cancer, many families are faced with challenges in language, diet, customs and healing methods that are very different from their own when they come to Honolulu for treatment.

Motivations to use CAM and TH are numerous, but when it relates to cancer care, one such reason may be for

patients and families to feel as if all options have been explored^[5]. These holistic modalities may also offer hope that touches on the spiritual aspect of healing, without being explicitly religious in nature.

Another motivating factor may have to do with the cultural context of the patients and their families, and their perceptions and beliefs on what healing means to them. The aim of this project was to assess TH and CAM use within the pediatric oncology population in Honolulu and improve the delivery of culturally competent, family-centered care to these families.

2 Materials and methods

2.1 Population

All children and families of children who were being treated for cancer at the Kapi’olani Medical Center for Women and Children (KMCWC), Honolulu, Hawai’i were approached for participation in this project. Participants were surveyed during a 3-month period between March and June, 2015. All families of children in active treatment (inpatient and outpatient chemotherapy, radiation, or surgery) as well as patients in long-term follow-up were approached for participation.

A 9-item survey (Figure 1) was distributed to all pediatric oncology patients and families at the medical center. Survey participation was voluntary and not anonymous; the majority of surveys were distributed and collected by one of the study authors. The project leaders

<p>1. Which of the following best represents your racial or ethnic heritage? Which do you identify with?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Non-Hispanic White, or Euro-American</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Black, Afro-Caribbean or African American</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Latino or Hispanic American</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> East Asian or Asian American</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Japanese</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Chinese</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Korean</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Filipino</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Vietnamese/Cambodian</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Native or Part Native Hawaiian</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other Pacific Islanders</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Fijian, Tongan</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Marshallese</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Guamaian or Chamorro</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> American Indian or Alaska Native</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Middle Eastern or Arab American</p> <p>2. What is your child’s ethnicity/race? Please list all that he/she identify with</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>3. What is your first language?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>4. Do you use TH methods at home? Which ones?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>5. Do you use TH methods at the hospital? Which ones?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>6. Do you use any CAM therapy at home?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>(Examples of CAM: Meditation, Yoga, Massage, Healing Touch/Reiki, Acupuncture, Herbs and Aromatherapy)</p> <p>7. Do you use any CAM therapy in the hospital? Which ones?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>8. Do you think your doctors and nurses understand cultural aspects of your health care needs?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>If no, what can be done to improve this understanding?</p> <p>_____</p>
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Figure 1 Survey: CAM practices related to culture and ethnicity
TH: traditional healing; CAM: complementary and alternative medicine.

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