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SURVEY

Application of Traditional Chinese Medicine in medical practice: a survey of community residents in Beijing, China

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Abstract

OBJECTIVE: To investigate how community residents in Beijing understood and used Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) in their medical practice.

METHODS: This was a cross-sectional study conducted on 3410 community residents from four large communities of Tongzhou district in Beijng, China. A validated, self-administered questionnaire comprised of three sections was used to gather the data. A systematic sampling procedure was applied to recruit the community residents.

RESULTS: A total of 3410 participants completed the questionnaire survey. It showed that in highly educated residents, 33.4% (170) knew of the names of 3-10 Chinese herbals, 35.8% (182) knew of names of 3-10 traditional Chinese patent drug. Among all the respondent residents, 80.7% (2753) believed that TCM herbal therapy and TCM non-drug treatments were effective in disease treatment, health enhancement, 85.7% (2923) had taken traditional Chinese patent drug in their life, 56.8% (1937) of residents had used herbal decoction, 40.0% (1365) had received non-drug treatment of TCM, such as acupuncture, massage, cupping, auricular acupuncture. Among the elderly residents, 11.4% (98) often used Chinese patent drug and 9.8% (85) often used herbal decoction. In addition, 70.8% (2415) of residents were willing to accept knowledge and information on TCM for health enhancement and disease prevention, such as medicated diet, medicinal tea, Tai Chi and Qi Gong, although 82.8% (2825) of residents had never used them.

CONCLUSION: Chinese patent drug and herbal decoction are widely used in the communities in Beijing, and there existed a possible close correlation between high educational level and better understanding of TCM. Age and occupation also correlated with the attitude to TCM therapies. The characteristics of the residents should be considered seriously in the course of promoting the understanding and application of TCM.

Keywords: Medicine, Chinese traditional; Surveys and questionnaires; Comprehension; Community residents

INTRODUCTION

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is a primary category of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) in the opinion of Western Medicine.[1,2] TCM practices can be traced back to more than 3000 years ago. The special concepts of organ manifestations, Meridians, holistic conception, syndrome differentiation and various methods of treatment, such as herbal formula, Acupuncture, Massage, Qi Gong, originated from ancient China.[3,4]

Due to the increasing demand for TCM knowledge and information worldwide, the understanding, cognition, and self-use of TCM among the public have become a topic of interest. Particularly, many previous studies also have demonstrated dramatic increases in the understanding and application of TCM in China, the United States, Canada, Australia, and European countries.[5-8]

However, most prevalent studies on TCM understanding and application issue were based primarily on common questionnaire surveys, simple telephone interviews or collecting few data from insurance claims, comprehensive and systematic survey has rarely been conducted. For example, no survey has been reported focusing on community residents, using a well development questionnaire that includes TCM non-drug therapy (acupuncture, massage, cupping, auricular acupuncture, TCM healthcare knowledge and treatment technique, such as medicated diet, medicinal tea, Tai Chi and Qi Gong).

This survey aimed at investigating the residents' understanding and application of TCM in their medical practice in Beijing.

METHODS

Sampling and data collection

This is a cross-sectional study. According to Chinese Residents of Nutrition and Health Survey in 2010, the minimum sample size of qualitative data was estimated and 3747 community residents in Tongzhou District, the center of Beijing with a permanent population of 120 000 and 15 villages, were selected between March 1 and July 30, 2013. A multi-stage sampling method was adopted. First, cluster sampling was conducted to sample four villages from Tongzhou district and one large community were randomly selected in each village, then systematic sampling was conducted to select 947 residents in each community. The four large communities of Tongzhou district were Majuqiao community, Mizidian community, Xuxinzhuang community and Liyuan community.

In each community, every eligible resident has to meet the following criterion: (a) Age ≥ 18 years old. (b) Has lived in the local for more than 3 years. (c) Without mental disease or cognitive dysfunction. Furthermore, written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interview. Ethics approval was also obtained from the Survey and Behavioral Research Ethics Committee of Dongzhimen hospital, the first affiliated hospital of Beijing University of Chinese Medicine.

Questionnaire

The contents of this questionnaire were determined by a professional team. The questionnaire which consisted of three parts was eventually adopted after gained the experts consensus. The first part aimed to collect data of the respondents' demographic and health condition, including gender, age, household registry status, education, occupation, self-evaluation on health status, and chronic disease status, such as hypertension, diabetes, cerebrovascular disease, etc.

In the second part, the basic situation of the understanding on TCM was assessed. Specifically, respondents were asked how many they had known the following types of names: (a) Chinese herb; (b) traditional Chinese patent drug; (c) acupoint. Besides, they were asked to evaluate whether TCM or TCM non-drug treatments would be effective in diseases treatment, health enhancement and preservation. The options included certainly, some effect, fail, and do not know.

Information on the basic condition of TCM application was collected in the third part. Residents were asked whether they had received the following types of TCM therapies: (a) Chinese herbal decoction; (b) Chinese patent drug; (c) non-drug therapy of TCM, such as acupuncture, massage, cupping, auricular acupuncture. Moreover, they were asked whether they had used the TCM healthcare knowledge and technique, such as medicated diet, medicinal tea, Tai Chi, and Qi Gong. The options of answer included never before, sometimes, often.

Data analysis

The database was established with Epidata 3.1 software (The EpiData Association Odense, Denmark) based on all questionnaires, the input data had been checked twice by two separate persons before analysis. All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS 13.0 (SPSS Inc., SPSS for Windows, Version 13.0, Chicago, IL, USA). χ^2 tests were applied to test the differences between groups. $P < 0.05$ was the statistical significant level.

RESULTS

Characteristics of respondents

A total of 3747 residents were enrolled in the study, 3410 of the participants completed the surveys (response rate: 91%). The mean age of the responders was (49 ± 15) years (range, 18-82 years). Education condi-