

Beliefs about complementary and alternative medicine predict use among patients with cancer

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A new study has shed light on how cancer patients' attitudes and beliefs drive the use of complementary and alternative medicine. Published early online in *Cancer*, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Cancer Society, the findings may help hospitals develop more effective and accessible integrative oncology services for patients.

Although many cancer [patients](#) use complementary and alternative medicine, what drives this usage is unclear. To investigate, a team led by Jun Mao, MD and Joshua Bauml, MD, of the Abramson Cancer Center at the University of Pennsylvania's Perelman School of Medicine, conducted a survey-based study in their institution's thoracic, breast, and gastrointestinal medical oncology clinics.

Among 969 participants surveyed between June 2010 and September 2011, patients who were younger, those who were female, and those who had a college education tended to expect greater benefits from complementary and alternative medicine. Nonwhite patients reported more perceived barriers to the use of complementary and alternative medicine compared with white patients, but their expectations concerning the medicine's benefits were similar. Attitudes and beliefs about complementary and alternative medicine were much more likely to affect patients' use than clinical and demographic characteristics.

"We found that specific attitudes and beliefs—such as expectation of

therapeutic benefits, patient-perceived barriers regarding cost and access, and opinions of patients' physician and family members—may predict patients' use of complementary and alternative medicine following cancer diagnoses," said Dr. Mao. "We also found that these beliefs and attitudes varied by key socio-demographic factors such as sex, race, and education, which highlights the need for a more individualized approach when clinically integrating complementary and alternative medicine into conventional cancer care."

The researchers noted that as therapies such as acupuncture and yoga continue to demonstrate clinical benefits for reducing pain, fatigue, and psychological distress, the field of integrative oncology is emerging to bring complementary and alternative medicine together with conventional care to improve patient outcomes. "Our findings emphasize the importance of patients' [attitudes](#) and beliefs about complementary and [alternative medicine](#) as we seek to develop [integrative oncology](#) programs in [academic medical centers](#) and community hospitals," said Dr. Bauml. "By aligning with patients' expectations, removing unnecessary structural barriers, and engaging patients' social and support networks, we can develop patient-centered clinical programs that better serve diverse groups of [cancer patients](#) regardless of sex, race, and education levels."

More information: "Do attitudes and beliefs about complementary and alternative medicine impact utilization among patients with cancer? A cross-sectional survey." Joshua Bauml, Sagar Chokshi, Marilyn M. Schapira, Eun-Ok Im, Susan Q. Li, Corey Langer, Said Ibrahim, and Jun J. Mao. *Cancer*; Published Online: May 26, 2015. [DOI: 10.1002/cncr.29173](#)

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