

ATTITUDES AND KNOWLEDGE OF NURSES' TOWARDS REFERRING PATIENTS TO COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE PRACTITIONERS, USING THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI AS A MODEL

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ABSTRACT

There is a growing consumer demand for complementary and alternative therapies (CAM) and health care professionals must be knowledgeable to advise their patients. The discipline of nursing is rooted in many holistic processes but the role of providing such or referring patients to CAM services has not been fully defined. Nurses are the members of the healthcare team who often initiate such a conversation with patients about CAM, and therefore the specific training and knowledge of CAM needs to be determined. Understanding the baseline knowledge and beliefs related to CAM will determine if adequate education is lacking and therefore a barrier to implementing CAM practices in the acute care setting. For a starting point, this descriptive study explores Mississippi nurses' attitude and knowledge on CAM instruction in school curricula or during professional continued education programs. This descriptive study with a sample size of 116 participants representing 16 higher education institutions was conducted during the Mississippi Nurses Association's Annual Meetings & Conventions. The findings of this study demonstrated that 80% of nurses felt that their higher education institution did not provide adequate education on CAM. Fifty three percent reported taking some course that cover a component of CAM, and 72.41% reported never referring patients to CAM practitioners. Our findings highlighted the fact that Mississippi nurses feel more comfortable referring patients to CAM practitioners when feeling knowledgeable. This study shine light on that nurses cannot recommend CAM therapies if they are not familiar with the benefits or risks associated with CAM and adequate educational programs need to be addressed at level of nursing curricula at the university and professional organizations level to develop continued education opportunities that fit the continuously changing healthcare system.

Keywords: Complementary & Alternative Medicine, Nurses (CAM) & Complementary and Alternative Medicine, Complementary & Alternative Medicine Education in Nursing School

Introduction

Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) is characterized by its focus on the whole person as a unique individual, and it differs from traditional medicine by focusing on the energy of the body and its influence on assembling the body's own resources to heal itself. A major emphasis is placed on the treatment of the underlying causes of the disease process, rather than managing the symptoms of the disease. Many of the techniques used are the subject of debatable conversations and have not been validated by controlled studies or the FDA [1]. The 2007 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) reported that adults in the United States spent \$33.9 billion out of pocket on visits to CAM practitioners and purchases of CAM products, classes, and material. Nearly two-thirds of the total out of pocket costs that adults spent on CAM in 2007 was for self-care purchases of CAM products, classes, and materials during the past 12 months (\$22.0 billion) compared with about one-third spent on practitioner visits (\$11.9 billion). A total of 44% of all out-of-pocket costs for CAM was spent on the purchase of non-vitamin, non-mineral, natural products. The survey found that 38.1 million adults made an estimated 354.2 million visits to CAM practitioner, at an estimated out-of-pocket cost of \$11.9 billion dollars. The majority of visits to CAM practitioners and out of pocket costs spent on CAM practitioners during the past 12 months were associated with manipulative and body-based therapies. On average, adults in the United States had out of pocket cost of \$121.92 per person for visits to CAM providers. Some of the highest per-person, out-of-pocket costs were associated with visits to practitioners of naturopathy and chelation therapy, while one of the lowest per-person, out-of-pocket costs was associated with visits to practitioners of chiropractic or osteopathic manipulation therapy, and non-vitamin, non-mineral, natural products (\$14.8 billion) accounted for most out-of-pocket dollars spent on CAM self-care purchases [2]. Numerous studies