

Relief of Symptoms, Side Effects, and Psychological Distress Through Use of Complementary and Alternative Medicine in Women With Breast Cancer

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Purpose/Objectives: To identify use of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) for relief of symptoms and side effects among women diagnosed with breast cancer and to identify demographic and clinical factors associated with the use of CAM in these patients.

Design: A descriptive, cross-sectional survey.

Setting: Clinics and community groups in the Tampa Bay area and community groups in a rural midwestern area.

Sample: A convenience sample of 105 predominantly Caucasian women (\bar{X} age = 59 years) with a diagnosis of breast cancer was recruited from the Tampa Bay area and a rural midwestern area.

Methods: The instrument used to gather the data was the Use of Complementary Therapies Survey. The reasons for choosing 33 individual CAM treatments were tabulated. The frequency of use was calculated according to four reasons: (a) to reduce physical symptoms or side effects, (b) to reduce psychological distress, (c) to gain a feeling of control over treatment, or (d) because of dissatisfaction with traditional medical care. Least-squares regression models were fit to identify independent demographic and clinical predictors of CAM therapy use.

Main Research Variables: Use of CAM for relief of physical and psychological distress.

Findings: Patients used all categories of CAM therapies to reduce physical symptoms and side effects. The most frequently cited reason for use of CAM was to reduce the symptom of psychological distress, whereas the lowest frequency of CAM use was because of dissatisfaction with traditional medical care. Traditional and ethnic medicines frequently were used to reduce physical symptoms and side effects, followed by diet and nutritional supplements. The most frequently used CAM therapy category cited for gaining a feeling of control over treatment was use of diet and nutritional supplements. Previous chemotherapy and having more than a high school education were associated with more frequent use of diet and nutritional supplements and stress-reducing techniques.

Conclusions: Frequency of specific use according to type of CAM was higher and more specific than reported in other studies. Patients who had undergone chemotherapy were most likely to use CAM.

Implications for Nursing: Oncology nurses are in a key position to identify which symptoms or side effects patients are experiencing and which CAM therapies may be helpful to relieve patients' symptoms related to treatment and psychological distress related to their cancer.

Key Points . . .

- Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) therapies are being used for symptom and side-effect relief, to reduce psychological stress, to gain control over treatment among women, and because of dissatisfaction with traditional medical care.
- Use of diet and nutritional supplements and stress-reducing techniques was associated with previous chemotherapy and having more than a high school education.
- Assessment of reasons for CAM use is an important consideration and may have implications for the cancer treatments patients are receiving.
- Effective implementation of CAM therapies may relieve physical symptoms or psychological distress or give patients a feeling of control over their illness.

ment and the effectiveness of CAM treatments in this context have not been well documented. Complementary medicine is defined as therapy that is used for symptom management and to improve quality of life while patients with cancer are

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Although several studies reporting use of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) in patients with breast cancer have been carried out in North America and Europe, patterns of use of CAM in symptom manage-