

The Use of Complementary and Alternative Medicine in Breast Cancer: Bridging the Gap

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Introduction: Breast cancer is the most prevalent cancer in United Kingdom. The extensive use of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) by women suffering from breast cancer is well documented in research. A study in Canada, reported this use to be as high as 80%. In a similar survey in Germany, over 90% of breast cancer patients used some kind of CAM therapy. Similar trends have been reported in USA, and Asia.

The literature highlights a disturbing lack of communication between healthcare professionals and patients about CAM use. Up to 77% of cancer patients do not reveal their CAM use. This creates a communication gap and could hinder efforts to provide effective healthcare. Our study aims to address this deficit.

Aims:

We have two aims:

1. To explore the Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) towards CAM. of women with breast cancer, to understand:
 - Why they use CAMs.
 - What they believe are the benefits of using CAMs.
 - What women their reasons for not discussing CAM use with their doctors.
2. To use this information to develop means of improving communication between cancer patients and their Health Care Professionals.

Methods: The study adopted a qualitative (ethnographic) approach. It was a cross-sectional, observational study of women attending a breast cancer out-patient clinic at an English Cancer Centre. In the first part, twelve patients were recruited and interviewed in-depth to explore their use of CAMs. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. These were then analysed using a general Thematic Analysis to identify the range of themes and issues reported in the interviews. In the second part, self-administered questionnaires were developed from the interview data and distributed to all women attending the clinic. These were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics in SPSS to discover how prevalent the themes and issues reported in the first phase were.

Results: The results of this study will be presented and opened to discussion.