

Gender Specific Use of Complementary and Alternative Medicine: Results of a Survey of Patients Seen at Different Specialty Areas in a Tertiary-Care Center

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Objective: To compare the use of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) by male (m) and female (f) patients seen in different specialty areas of an academic medical center.

Method: A survey of CAM use during the previous 6 months arranged into 3 domains: Treatments/Techniques (21 qs), Vitamins/Minerals (12 qs, excluding multiple vitamins, vitamin D, folic acid, calcium, iron, potassium), and Herbs/Other Dietary Supplements (52 qs) was administered to 1,514 adult patients in 5 specialties (General Internal Medicine, Oncology, Preoperative Clinic, Physical Medicine, Spine Center) between September and December 2002.

Results: Response rate: 99.5% with 55% being women. Total CAM use: 76% of patients (m = 72%, f = 80%, $p=0.0003$). Use was higher in women across all 5 specialties. Treatments/Techniques: the number used differed by sex (m: 3.5; f: 4.6; $p<0.0001$). More frequently used by women ($p<0.05$): spiritual healing, weight loss programs, massage, aromatherapy, art therapy, reflexology, relaxation therapy, exercise, energy healing. Vitamins/Minerals: the number used differed by sex (m: 1.7; f: 2.3; $p<0.0001$). There was no specific Vitamin/Mineral more frequently used by either sex. Herbs/Other Dietary Supplements: the number used differed by sex (m: 0.93; f: 0.99; $p=0.02$). Besides the expected gender specific use of evening primrose oil and saw palmetto, green tea was more frequently used by women ($p<0.0001$).

Conclusion: CAM use was more common in females ($p=0.0003$) as was the number of modalities used across all specialties. There was a gender specific difference in the use of several modalities in the Treatment/Technique and Herbs/Other Dietary Supplement domain.