

STUDY OF CANCER PATIENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS ALTERNATIVE TREATMENT

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Purpose : This study was designed to gain an understanding of the degree to which cancer patients choose to turn to alternative treatment methods, to find out what factors play a role in this preference, and to encourage medical personnel to open their mind to the ergonomic and educational aspects of this tendency towards alternative treatment methods. Consequently, this should lead to a more positive approach to convincing patients to submit to scientific medical treatment and increase their familiarity therewith, so that they can take advantage of both types of treatment when carried out simultaneously.

Materials and Methods : The study was carried out at the Linkou Chang Gung Memorial Hospital from November 1, 1997 to November 30, 1999. Eight hundreds and seventy-two patients were entered in the study, being cancer patients undergoing radiotherapy at the hospital's Radiation Oncology Department. Admission was based on a questionnaire that had to be filled in by each patient, in which they were assisted by senior nursing staff of the Radiation Oncology Department. This questionnaire had to be filled in twice, the first time within the first week during radiotherapy and the second time within 6 months after completion of the treatment.

Results : There were various types of alternative treatments that the studied patients received before or during the radiotherapy course, including folk recipe, breathing exercises, massage, vegetarian food. Among the various types of alternative treatments, diet alternative treatments were most significantly increased during radiotherapy. Therefore, it was understood that the cancer patients thought diet was closely associated with cancer diseases. Of those patients who turned to alternative treatment methods either before or during radiotherapy, most would choose more than one alternative, but mostly in the form of popular treatment methods primarily being the administering of medicinal herbs. One hundred sixty and one patients would recommend such treatments to other patients. Whether or not alternative treatment methods were effective directly influenced the patient's inclination to recommend such treatments to other patients ($p < 0.0001$). After local radiotherapy, the majority of the studied patients would design health care programs themselves and modify their life styles.

Conclusion : The intent of the cancer patients to accept the standard treatments such as radiotherapy did not conflict with the intent for them to turn to alternative treatments. Although taking alternative treatments is not recommended, it is not practical to prohibit their use. Considering the vast cost turning to alternative treatments must result in, the medical and nursing staff should help the patients select their alternative treatments seriously in order to lead to economic difficulties and psychophysical affliction. Further large-scale clinical investigations are needed to study whether alternative treatments would influence the effectiveness of the recommended standard treatments or not.

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Key words: Alternative treatment, Cancer treatment, Radiotherapy