

Survey of the Use of Traditional and Complementary Medicine (T&CM) Among Children with Cancer at three hospitals in Cameroon.

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Abstract

Introduction There is lack of diagnostic and treatment resources with variable access to childhood cancer treatment in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC), which may lead to subsequent poor survival. The primary aim of this study is to determine the prevalence and types of T&CM used in Cameroon. Secondly, we explored determinants of T&CM use, associated costs, perceived benefits and harm, and disclosure of T&CM use to medical team. **Method** A prospective, cross-sectional survey amongst parents and carers of children younger than 15 years of age who had a cancer diagnosis and received cancer treatment at three Baptist Mission hospitals between November 2017 and February 2019. **Results** Eighty participants completed the survey. Median patient age was 8.1 years (IQR4.1 – 11.1). There was significant availability (90%) and use (67.5%) of T&CM, while 24% thought T&CM would be good for cancer treatment. Common T&CM remedies included herbs and other plant remedies or teas taken by mouth, prayer for healing purposes and skin cutting. Living more than 5 hours away from the treatment center ($p=0.030$), anticipated costs (0.028), and a habit of consulting a traditional healer when sick ($p=0.006$) were associated with the use of T&CM. T&CM was mostly paid for in cash (36.3%) or provided free of charge (20%). Of importance was the fact that nearly half (44%) did not want to disclose the use of TM to their doctor. **Conclusion** Pediatric oncology patients used T&CM before and during treatment but would be unlikely to disclose to the child's health care team.

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