

Use of Complementary and Alternative Medicine by Physicians in St. Petersburg, Russia

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ABSTRACT

Background: Interest in complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) is increasing worldwide, although relatively little is known of physician use of CAM, and there are no quantitative reports of CAM use by Russian physicians.

Objective: The objective of this study was to determine the prevalence of CAM therapies among practicing physicians and determine predictors of CAM usage.

Design: This was a convenience sample prevalence survey.

Setting: The study involved 3 urban academic hospitals in St. Petersburg, in Russia.

Subjects: Participants included 192 physicians practicing at the three study hospitals.

Measurements: The study determined the number (from a list of 32) of CAM therapies that physicians used on themselves, used on their patients, or referred their patients to receive.

Results: One hundred and seventy-seven (177; 92%) of the surveyed physicians responded. One hundred percent (100%) of the respondents had practiced CAM or referred patients for at least two CAM therapies. One hundred and seventy-five (175; 99%) had themselves practiced at least two therapies. On average, each physician had practiced or referred patients for 12.7 (95% confidence interval, 11.9–13.6) therapies. On multivariate analysis, knowledge of a foreign language, surgical specialty, and female gender were significantly ($p < 0.05$) associated with increased CAM usage, while critical care specialty and completion of only an internship were associated with lower rates of CAM practice.

Conclusions: Physician use of CAM in Russia appears very high. The high prevalence of CAM may complicate adoption of Western evidence-based practices. Predictors and effects of CAM usage in Russian society warrant further study.

INTRODUCTION

Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) has been defined by Eisenberg as medicine not taught or practiced at conventional U.S. medical schools. Interest in CAM has increased as the majority of patients have been shown to utilize such therapies, and most do not report this use to their physicians.^{1,2} The relationship of mainstream physicians to CAM has been the object of some international study. A meta-analysis in 1995³ and a thorough review in 1998⁴ have summarized that research. Several reports have

documented crosscultural differences, even among the industrialized Western economies.⁵ One review noted usage rates of 30% in the United States and approximately 50% in France and Germany.⁶ A survey of 121 Quebecois physicians showed that approximately 75% had referred patients for an alternative therapy and 20% of the physicians had received some training in a CAM therapy.⁷ Average physician practice of CAM from 19 methodologically acceptable studies ranged from 9% to 19%, with referral rates ranging from 4% to 43%.⁴

Studies of CAM are often marked by low response rates,

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