

Prevalence in the use of complementary medicine among cancer patients in Tuscany, Italy

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ABSTRACT

Aims and background. A previous survey by Molassiotis *et al.* (Ann Oncol, 16: 655-663, 2005) on the use of complementary and alternative medicines (CAM) among cancer patients in Europe reported that 73% of the Italian cancer patients had used CAM, a number well above the European average of 36%. Some national variation in preference of CAM was reported, and Italian cancer patients were reported to have high use of homeopathy, herbal medicine, and spiritual therapies. The difference between CAM use in Italy and other European countries intrigued a further investigation of CAM use among Italian cancer patients.

Methods. A survey using the same questionnaire as Molassiotis *et al.* was conducted at two oncology day hospitals in Tuscany and included 132 patients (55% male, 45% female, with various forms of cancer) on chemotherapy. The response rate was 71%.

Results. The incidence of CAM use after the cancer diagnosis among the Tuscan cancer patients was 17%. The most widely used forms were herbal medicine (52%), homeopathy (30%) and acupuncture (13%). Use was higher in the urban area and among women, breast cancer patients, and persons with a higher education. These results agree with results of other studies on the use of CAM among Italians and Europeans in general, as well as among cancer patients in Italy.

Conclusions. The high prevalence of CAM use among Italians reported by Molassiotis *et al.* cannot be regarded a national estimate on the use of CAM for cancer in Italy. Rather it may reflect a relatively high use of CAM in palliative care, in Northern Italy and in urban areas. CAM use among Italians in general as well as among Tuscan cancer patients in chemotherapy is modest compared with the overall European use and reflects a general high use of CAM among urbanites, women and those with a higher education. Most commonly used forms of CAM are herbal medicine and homeopathy.

Key words: complementary medicine, usage of CAM, Tuscany.

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