

# USE, PREVALENCE AND PATTERN OF ALTERNATIVE MEDICINES AMONG INDIAN CANCER PATIENTS

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## ABSTRACT

### Introduction:

Use of traditional and alternative medicine has been identified by oncologists as one of potential reasons for delay in seeking medical attention, but very limited research has been conducted to verify such claims.

### Objectives:

To understand the prevalence and pattern of alternative medicines among Indian cancer patients.

### Methods:

An exploratory design was adopted for study. Using purposive sampling method, patients (N=303, M:146 & F:157) undergoing cancer treatment at Rajiv Gandhi Cancer Hospital and Research Center, Delhi, India; aged 15-88 years were included. Structured in-depth interviews were conducted. These interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed.

### Results:

Irrespective of age, gender and education, 34% patients had taken alternative medicine while 21% were considering it. Commonest form of alternative therapy was Ayurveda reported by 85% patients. Majority of patients 61% had taken alternative medicines before starting medical treatment and 39% were taking it along with conventional treatment. Common reasons for taking alternative therapies were influence media (44%), suggestions from family (31%) and fellow patients (19%). Majority 81% believe that there are no side effects of alternative treatment and 40% were satisfied with it, while 41% were not satisfied and 19% did not answer the question. Only 3% patients had discussed with their treating oncologist about this treatment.

### Conclusions:

This study suggest that alternative medicines are used frequently and increasingly. Detail history of use of alternative Medicines should be elicited in clinical practice as this will help counselling the patient about adverse effect and possible drug interactions. The effectiveness of this type of treatments remain to be determined.