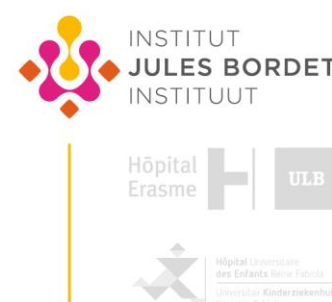




HÔPITAL UNIVERSITAIRE DE BRUXELLES  
ACADEMISCH ZIEKENHUIS BRUSSEL



INSTITUT JULES BORDET  
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# THE CAIROS PROJECT: DEVELOPMENT OF A PERSONALIZED INTEGRATIVE CARE PROGRAM

Marie-Aline Echterbille<sup>1-4</sup>, Florence Horicks (PhD)<sup>2</sup>, Yves Libert (PhD)<sup>1-3</sup>, Isabelle Merckaert (PhD)<sup>1,3</sup>, Dirk Van Gestel (MD, PhD)<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Medicine Oncology Department, Institut Jules Bordet, H.U.B, Université Libre de Bruxelles, Brussels, Belgium; <sup>2</sup> Pôle Santé, Université Libre de Bruxelles, Brussels, Belgium

<sup>3</sup> Université libre de Bruxelles, Faculté des Sciences Psychologiques et de l'Éducation, Unité de Recherche en Psychosomatique et Psycho-oncologie (URPP), Brussels, Belgium

<sup>4</sup> Medical Direction, Institut Jules Bordet, H.U.B, Université Libre de Bruxelles, Brussels, Belgium; <sup>5</sup> Faculty of Medicine, Université Libre de Bruxelles, Brussels, Belgium

## Background

Integrative oncology addresses challenges associated with cancer, extending beyond pathology and treatment to encompass physical, psychological, social, and spiritual needs<sup>1</sup>. Today, integrative oncology faces limitations such as insufficient recognition, lack of scientific evidence, patient safety concerns, and provider heterogeneity<sup>2,3</sup>. To overcome these shortcomings, the CAIROS (Center of Academic IntegRative Oncology and Support) project aims at implementing and assessing a personalized integrative care program based on unmet patient needs<sup>4</sup>.

## Objective and Methods

A multi-method study was designed. A first survey evaluated patients' needs and habits regarding integrative oncology. A second survey was addressed to health care professionals (HCPs) to evaluate their perception of integrative oncology adoption, and identify the resources needed to implement an integrative patient care journey.

## Patient Survey

### Primary objective

- To evaluate the patients' needs and habits regarding healthcare approaches.
- To better understand the patients' habits regarding complementary therapies.

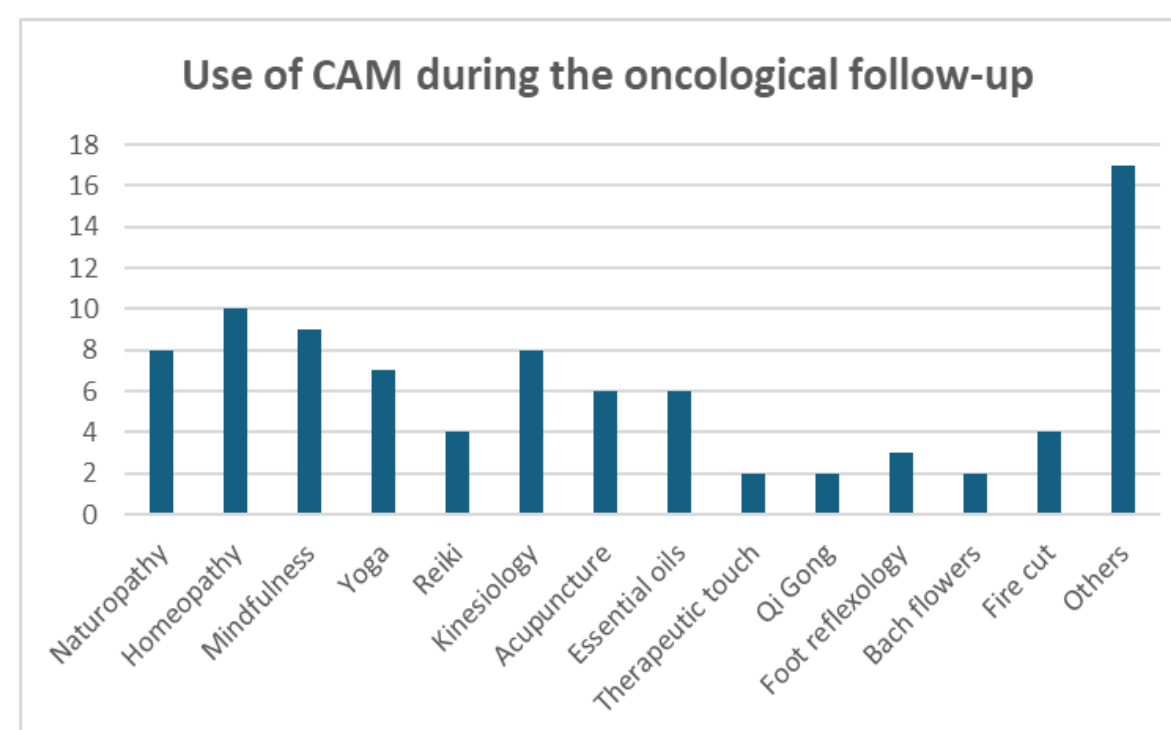
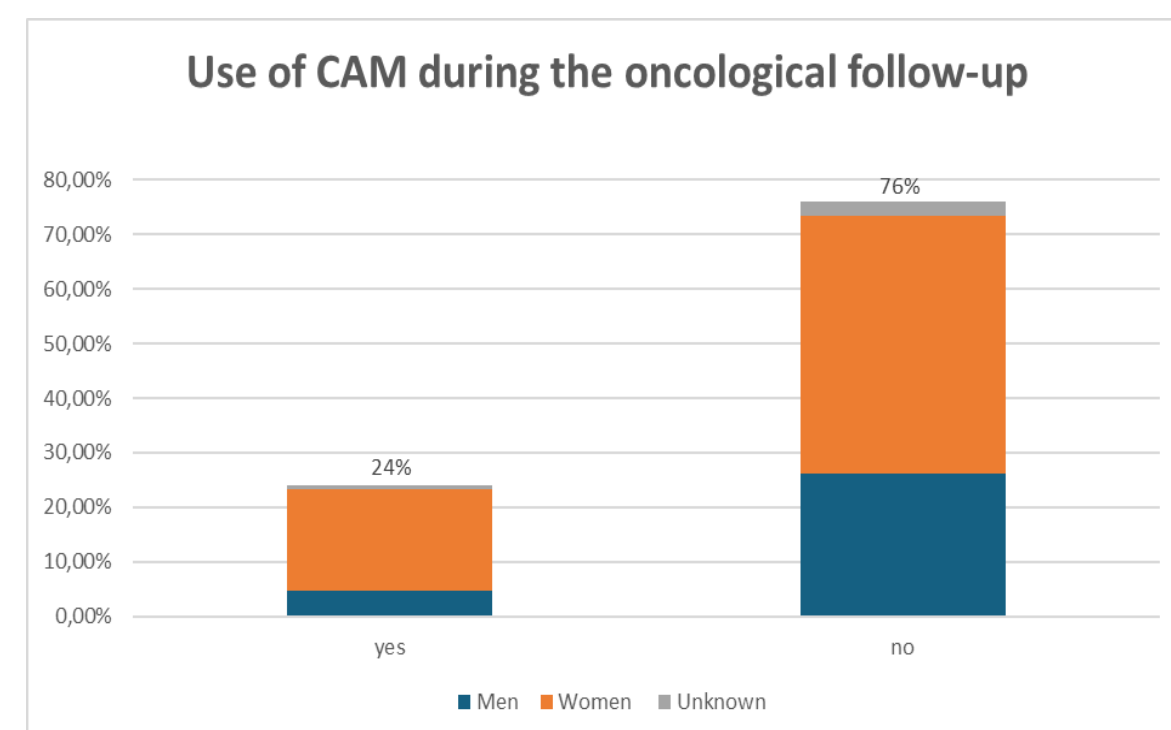
### Patients and methods

Questionnaires were distributed in the day hospital and in the radiotherapy unit from 15 June to 31 August 2023. They were proposed to the patients by the nurse (day clinic) or by the secretary (RT unit) upon the patient arrival in the waiting room.

150 questionnaires were filled in (114 in the day hospital, 35 in the RT unit, 1 unknown).

### Results

The patient survey indicates a strong interest in complementary care, with a large majority of the respondents being women (66%), mainly treated for breast cancer (65,3%). 55,6% of the users resort to more than one complementary and/or alternative medicine (CAM). Body-mind techniques (37,8%) and herbs/supplements (31,8%) are mostly used. Several respondents expressed the need for more secure information regarding the use of CAMs and the desire for a clear indication from their oncologist.



## Health Care Professionals Survey

### Primary objective

- To evaluate the existing (beginning of interview) and potential (end of interview) degree of adherence of Heads of Department of the Hôpital Universitaire de Bruxelles (H.U.B) to integrative oncology
- To define the Head of Department's vision for the integration of integrative care into the oncology care pathway
- To evaluate the needs and necessary resources for caregivers to implement integrative oncology in their practice

### Population and methods

Forty responsables of the H.U.B were invited to take part in a one-hour semi-structured interview, 30 (Group 1) are heads of department/unit in the Jules Bordet Institute, the oncology division of the H.U.B. 10 (Group 2) belong to the Medical Direction of the H.U.B. 17 from Group 1 and 5 from Group 2 were interviewed from 6 May to 4 June 2024. Two interviews were not eligible for the study, due to transcription or content issues. Recruitment is still ongoing with further interviews being planned.

The results were analyzed using the Braun and Clarck method.

### Results

- Degree of adherence to integrative oncology:**

**All HCPs were supportive of integrative oncology** at the beginning of the interview, with 85% finding it necessary. Actually, many integrative approaches are already present within the hospital, but not in a structured way.

At the end of the interview, 40% stressed the urge of implementing integrative care pathways, and 40% had a clear strategic vision of what needed to be done to achieve it.

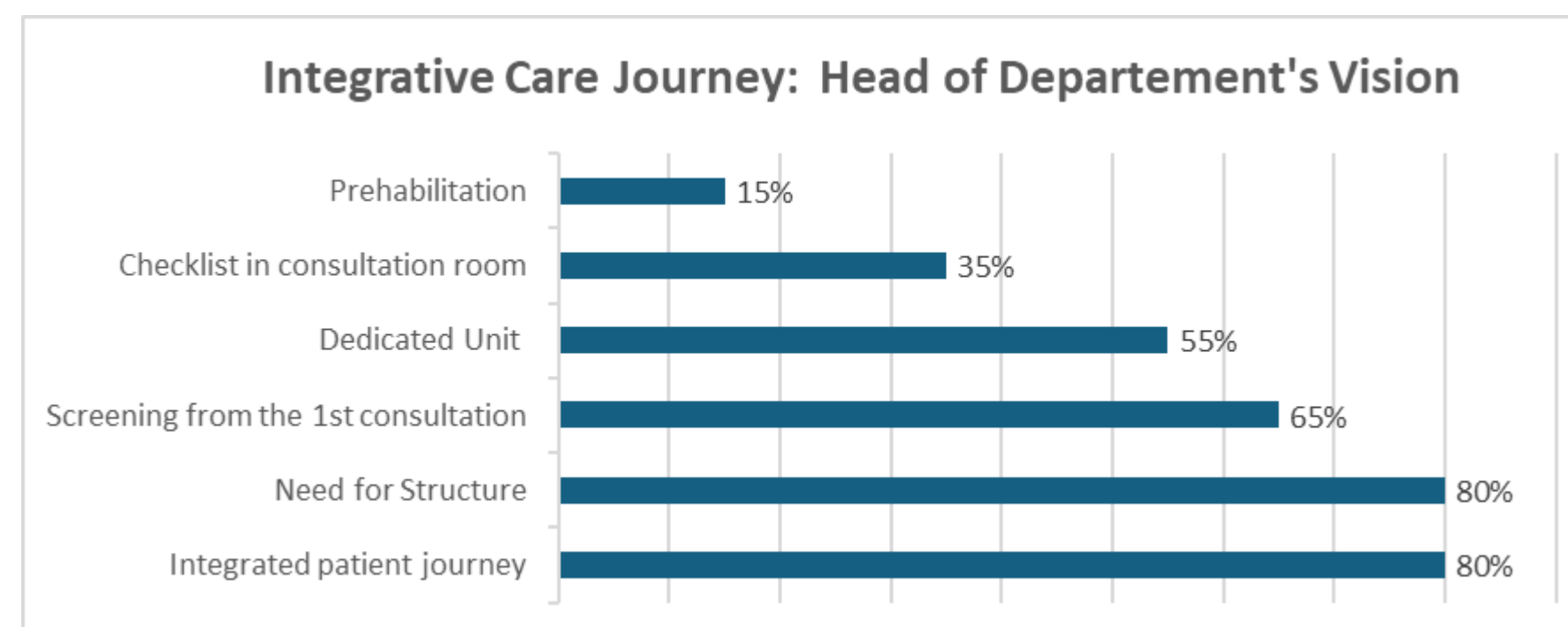
- Head of department's vision for an integrative oncology care journey:**

A large majority of the responsables are in favour of an integrative patient journey (80%), underlining the need for a clear structure to articulate it (80%).

The practical organisation of the integrative patient journey should begin with a full screening of the patient's needs and life habits upon the first consultation, or just after the announcement of the diagnosis (65%). 55% of the interviewees are supportive of a dedicated integrative care unit, composed of an HCP specialized in integrative oncology, and of a dedicated Oncology Care Coordinator. Such a structure would compensate for the lack of information on CAM and the lack of available time in the clinics.

If the screening of the patient's need of integrative oncology is carried out by the oncologist, 35% find it helpful to have a checklist in the consultation room.

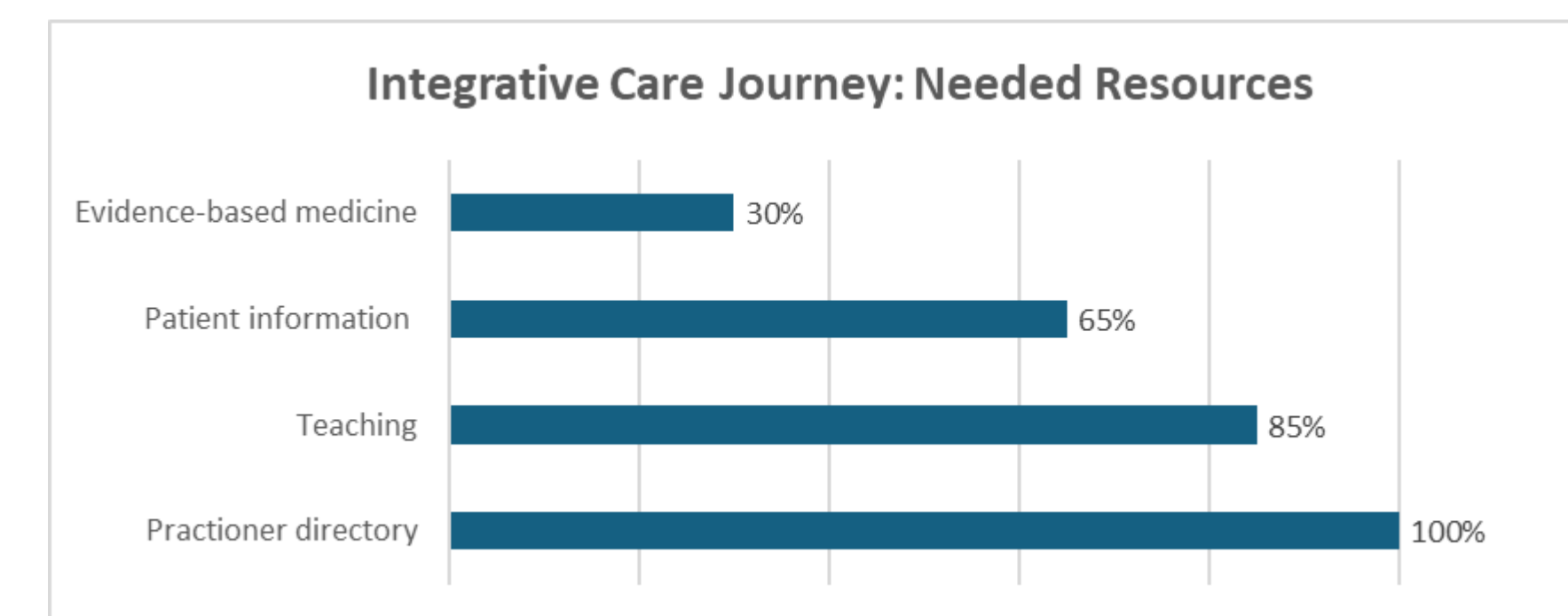
Interestingly, 15% have spontaneously suggested prehabilitation to be part of the integrative journey. Last but not least, 35% stress the lack of medical or paramedical staff or the actual workload to represent a possible obstacle for the implementation of such a journey.



- Resources needed for integrative oncology implementation in HCPs' practice:**

All interviewed HCPs request a practioner directory that groups integrative therapists recommended by the hospital by geographic area. A large majority (65%) suggest to increase the visibility of the hospital integrative possibilities via the usual patient communication tools (leaflet, information screens in the waiting rooms).

Only 30% insist on the need of evidence-based medicine (EBM) for implementing integrative oncology in the patient journey. As far as education is concerned, 85% are in demand of training, whether in the form of seminars (60%), continuing education (65%), or a university course included in the medical curriculum (30%).



## Conclusions

Our patient survey indicates a clear need for CAM within our integrated cancer center, with an important number of patients already using them on their own initiative.

The implementation of an integrative care pathway in the hospital setting addresses several critical needs identified by our medical professionals. The challenges of limited time and staffing are acknowledged, alongside a heightened demand for reliable intra- and extra-hospital networks and comprehensive information. There is a clear need for fluidity and visibility in the patient care journey.

The integrative care pathway proposal meets a genuine need from both patients and healthcare providers. The request of healthcare providers for further training underscores their commitment to integrated care and their desire to understand Complementary and Alternative Medicines (CAM) to better address patients' needs. Moving forward, it will be essential to evaluate whether the integrative care offering increases patients' demands.

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