

Using a mixed methods research design to investigate complementary alternative medicine (CAM)...

Posted At : March 20, 2013 4:44 PM | Posted By : [Tim Brunson, PhD](#)

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Full title: Using a mixed methods research design to investigate complementary alternative medicine (CAM) use among women with breast cancer in Ireland.

Eur J Oncol Nurs. 2012 Nov 20. pii: S1462-3889(12)00102-0. doi: 10.1016/j.ejon.2012.10.008. Fox P, Butler M, Coughlan B, Murray M, Boland N, Hanan T, Murphy H, Forrester P, O'Brien M, O'Sullivan N. UCD School of Nursing, Midwifery & Health Systems, University College Dublin, Belfield, Dublin, Ireland. Electronic address: patricia.fox@ucd.ie.

AIM: To investigate complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) use among women with breast cancer in Ireland using a mixed methods modified sequential explanatory design.

METHODS: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with oncology professionals (n = 20) and CAM practitioners (n = 20) and this was followed by a survey of 406 women with breast cancer using the 'Use of Complementary and Alternative Therapies Survey' questionnaire (UCATS) (Lengacher et al., 2003). Follow up interviews were subsequently undertaken with a subset of this survey sample (n = 31).

RESULTS: Over half of those surveyed (55.7%, n = 226) used some form of CAM since diagnosis. The most frequently used therapies were massage, herbal supplements (including herbs with oestrogenic properties), antioxidants, relaxation, counselling, health supplements, reflexology, reiki and support groups. Dietary interventions were used primarily to reduce symptoms and/or side effects while reduction of psychological stress was the primary reason for use of stress-reducing therapies. Most respondents reported that the CAM therapies they had used were helpful. The qualitative data elaborated on and provided clarification of the survey results.

CONCLUSIONS: Similar to international studies, CAM is popular among women with breast cancer in Ireland. As such, the challenge for Irish oncology professionals is to identify low risk CAM therapies that are likely to benefit patients while educating patients and themselves on therapies which may be of concern. This study clearly illustrates the benefits of using a mixed methods approach to enhance our understanding of a complex clinical issue and thus we recommend that this method should be the method of choice when planning health services research.

Am J Hosp Palliat Care. 2012 Dec 5. Marcus DA, Blazek-O'Neill B, Kopar JL.

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