

# Complementary medicine use in patients with head and neck cancer in Ireland

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The objectives of the study were: first, to determine the prevalence of traditional medicine (TM) and complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) use in head and neck cancer patients in Ireland; second, to educate ourselves on the plethora of CAM/TM options available to patients outside the dominion of conventional medicine. The study design consisted of a cross-sectional survey carried out in three head and neck cancer centres. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to 110 head and neck cancer patients attending the three cancer centres and data were collected for statistical analysis. A total of 106 patients completed the questionnaire; 21.7% of the participants used CAM/TM since their diagnosis with head and neck cancer. CAM/TM usage was higher in female (34.3%) than in male patients (16.2%). CAM/TM use was more common in the 41-50-year age group, in patients with higher educational levels and those holding strong religious beliefs, and also in married than single patients. The most common types of CAM/TM used were spiritual and laying on of hands. The most common reasons reported for using CAM/TM were to counteract the ill effects of treatment and increase the body's ability to fight cancer. Sources of information on CAM/TM were friends (65%), family (48%) and media (21%). This survey reveals a high prevalence of CAM/TM use in head and neck cancer patients, hence emphasising the need for otolaryngologists to educate themselves on the various therapies available to be able to provide informative advice. There is an urgent need for evidence-based investigation of various CAM/TM therapies currently offered to patients.

Eur Arch Otorhinolaryngol. 2010 Aug;267(8):1291-7. Epub 2010 Mar 14. Amin M, Glynn F, Rowley S, O'Leary G, O'Dwyer T, Timon C, Kinsella J. Department of Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Cancer, St. James's Hospital, Dublin, Ireland. mohamin@rcsi.ie

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