

Complementary and alternative medicine in patients with chronic lymphocytic leukemia

Posted At : September 11, 2009 1:17 AM | Posted By : [Tim Brunson, PhD](#)

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BACKGROUND: Despite the widespread use of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) in the general population for the treatment of chronic diseases, only few data have been published for patients with leukemia. The aim of this survey was to study systematically the use of CAM in patients with chronic lymphocytic leukemia (CLL). **PATIENTS AND METHODS:** A structured questionnaire was sent to 247 CLL patients of all clinical stages and disease durations, treated and untreated. The questionnaire was returned anonymously by 87 patients (35%). **RESULTS:** Thirty-nine patients (44%) had used alternative treatments. No correlation was seen with educational level, gender, or previous or current chemotherapy. The most common alternative or complementary treatment modality was vitamin supplementation (26%), followed by mineral (18%), homeopathic (14%), and mistletoe therapy (9.2%). Some 21% of patients considered their alternative treatment as being successful. Most patients reported that they decided to use CAM after conducting a personal investigation and based on the information they found, without outside recommendations (59%). The majority of the patients used patient brochures about CLL as an important source of information (54%), followed by specific lectures (34%) or the internet (32%). **CONCLUSION:** Our data show that patients with CLL use a wide range of CAM, among them potentially harmful methods. Rational, evidence-based medical information about the effects and risks of CAM use should be made available through patient brochures distributed by patient organizations, through information events with lectures, or via the internet.

Support Care Cancer. 2009 Jan;17(1):47-52. Epub 2008 May 6. Hensel M, Zoz M, Ho AD. Department of Medicine V, University of Heidelberg, Heidelberg, Germany. Hensel@mannheimer-onkologie-praxis.de
