

# Complementary and alternative medical therapies used by children with cancer

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Full Title: Complementary and alternative medical therapies used by children with cancer treated at an Italian pediatric oncology unit

**BACKGROUND:** Research has identified a growing use of complementary and alternative medicines (CAM) in the pediatric oncology setting and health care professionals should consider how they might interact with and/or be used in lieu of conventional treatment. The present study was designed to establish the prevalence of CAM usage at an Italian pediatric oncology department, and the reasons why patients used these unconventional therapies. **PROCEDURE:** This was an observational study involving parents whose children were treated for tumors at the pediatric oncology unit of the Istituto Nazionale Tumori in Milano. Data were collected on their sociodemographic variables and their use of CAM by means of a self-administered questionnaire. **RESULTS:** We distributed 145 questionnaires and 97 of them (67%) were returned. Judging from this survey, 12.4% of the children used at least one type of CAM and homoeopathy was the most often used. Benefits were reported by 83% of parents. The most common reasons for using CAM were to reduce the side-effects of conventional therapies. The oncologists taking care of the patients were notified of the child's use of CAM in only one case. **CONCLUSION:** CAM were used not as a substitute but in addition to conventional treatments. In almost all cases, oncologists were not informed that a child was using CAM, posing a risk of any interaction with pharmacological treatments being inadequately understood.

Pediatr Blood Cancer. 2009 Oct;53(4):599-604 Clerici CA, Veneroni L, Giacom B, Mariani L, Fossati-Bellani F. Pediatric Oncology Unit, Fondazione IRCCS Istituto Nazionale Tumori, Milan, Italy. [carlo.clerici@unimi.it](mailto:carlo.clerici@unimi.it)

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