

Original Research Article

Doctor's Perception On Integrated Medicine

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ABSTRACT : Objective: To assess knowledge, attitude and practice of the modern medicine practitioners towards integration of modern medicine (MM) and traditional medicine (TM).

Methods: A cross sectional questionnaire based study was conducted to assess the knowledge, attitude and practice among doctors regarding integrated medicine. Hundred completed questionnaires were received from various doctors from in and around Hassan city. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Results: A total of 100 participants responded to the questionnaire, of which 68 were general practitioners and 32 were consultants from various specialties. More than 69% opined that TM was cheap and easily accessible, however, majority of participants believed MM to be more popular (66%). The main drawbacks reported of TM being minimum training (60%), unqualified traditional medicine practitioners (TMPs) (63%), inappropriate dose calculation (59%), lack of scientific evidence (69%), toxicity (56%) and unreliable diagnostic techniques (65%). About 66% doctors took history about TM use from their patients and 80% doctors treated them. Majority (64%) did not advise any TM. Though 56% had never collaborated with TMPs, 69% supported integration of TM with MM and believed this integrated approach would have positive impact on patients.

Conclusion: Majority of modern medicine practitioners were aware of traditional medicine. They believed that adequate scientific evidence and training of TMPs is required to accept and integrate TM with MM which may help in better patient care.

Key words: Allopathic doctors, perception, Alternate medicine, Traditional medicine.

INTRODUCTION

Integrated medicine is a combination of Modern and Traditional medicine (TM) which addresses the biological, spiritual, social and psychological aspects of patient's illness.^[1] Traditional medications were developed by different philosophies with diverse cultural background. The utilization of TM is popular in rural and urban areas because of its unique quality and affordability.^[2] The treatment approach varies in different systems of medicine, however all of them deal with human beings and aim at improving health. The World Health Organization (WHO) has recommended its member states to promote and integrate TM into their National health care system.^[3]

In the last few years, India has implemented integrated medicine with the idea of providing optimum solution to growing health care crisis at affordable cost.^[4] Department of Ayurveda, Yoga, Naturopathy, Siddha, Unani and Homeopathy (AYUSH), under the ministry of health and family welfare proposed a new approach by integrating various traditional practices with modern medicine to ensure health for all.^[5]

The integrated approach to treat a disease is not a new concept but its position is still at infancy. The success of this depends on the practitioner's opinion and attitude towards other health care systems. All the practitioners should identify the values, beliefs, fundamentals, strengths and weaknesses of all the systems. Studies have shown that TM practitioner's look for their counter parts of modern medicine to get more information about the illness/disease, but it's not the same with modern medicine practitioners.^[6,7] This study was undertaken to assess knowledge, attitude and practice of modern medicine practitioners towards integration of modern and traditional medicine.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Cross sectional questionnaire based study, which was conducted at district hospitals, Hassan, Karnataka, India.

- All the general practitioners, post graduate students and consultants willing to participate in the study from hospitals are included after obtaining written informed consent.
- The participants will be briefed about the purpose of the study and participant information sheet will be provided.
- A predesigned validated, questionnaire consisting of 23 questions (both open and close ended) will be used to assess the knowledge, attitude and practice.
- The questionnaire consist of four parts.
 - First part of the questionnaire contains eight questions regarding participants' demographic information, qualification, specialization and assessing knowledge of traditional medicine.

- Second part of questionnaire (nine questions) intended to collect opinion regarding advantages and disadvantages of traditional medicines.
- Seven questions were included in the third and fourth part of the questionnaire which assessed attitude towards acceptance of traditional medicine practice and about the integration of traditional and modern medicine.
- Descriptive Statistics will be applied to infer the findings

RESULTS

Demographic characteristics

All the 100 doctors completed the questionnaires, then were received and analyzed with a response rate of 100%. The demographic details of the participants are represented in Table 1. Among the respondents, local practitioners and junior doctors were considered as residents and specialists as consultants. They were categorized into two groups based on their interest to access information on TM.

Local practitioners and residents were 68 and the rest 32 were consultants from various specialties.

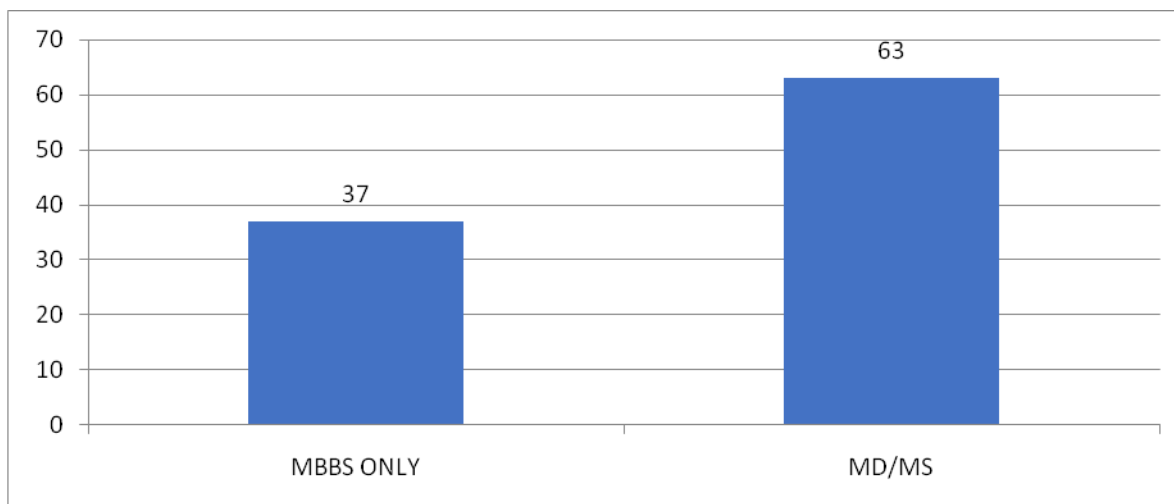
Attitude about integrated medicine

The comparison of awareness and attitude of modern medicine practitioners towards integrated medicine is presented in Table 2. The knowledge of integrated medicine is significantly high among those who accessed the information regarding traditional medicine.

The comparison of practice aspects and opinion of doctors on integrated medicine is shown in Table 3. Significantly higher number of doctors, who access information on TM, treated their patients referred from traditional practitioners (80%). Even though more number of doctors who accessed TM information (69%) supported integration of TM with MM. The collaboration of doctors with Traditional medicine practitioners (TMPs) was poor (44%). Majority (65%) of participants believed that integration of TM with MM would have a positive impact on patient care.

Demographic characteristics	Frequency (%)
Age (years)	
25-30	60
31-35	09
36-40	15
41-45	09
>45	07
Gender	
Male	56
Female	44
Qualifications	
MBBS only	37
MD/MS	63
Job description	
Local practitioners	12
Junior doctors	56
Consultants	32
Most commonly practiced TM in Indian	
Yoga/ Naturopathy	15
Ayurveda	72
Unani/Siddha/Acupuncture	00
Homeopathy	08
No response	05

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics
Figure 1: Qualification



Knowledge and attitude on integrated medicine among modern medicine practitioners

Questions		Practitioners accessing information on TM n=100(%)
Yes No	Are the traditional medicines (TM) cheap and accessible?	69 31
	Are the TM more popular than modern medicine (MM)	34 66
Agree Disagree	TM used for treatment of diseases not managed by modern medicine	37 63
	TM usage needs minimum training	60 40
Agree Disagree	TM has no advantage over MM	42 58
	TM commonly practiced by untrained person	63 37
Agree Disagree	TM does not have dose calculation/schedule	59 41
	TM does not have scientific evidence for their safety and efficacy	69 31
Agree Disagree	Toxicity is common with the use of TM	56 44
	TM follow unreliable diagnostic techniques	65 35

Table 2: Attitude about integrated medicine

Practice of integrated medicine among modern medicine practitioners		
Questions	Practitioners accessing information on TM n=100(%)	
	History of TM taken by practitioners	
Yes		66
No		34
	Treat patients referred from TM practitioners	
Yes		80
No		20
	Recommend patients to use TM	
Yes		37
No		63
	Advise traditional medicine for a patient	
Yes		36
No		64
	Support integration of TM with MM	
Yes		69
No		31
	Have collaboration with TM practitioners	
Yes		44
No		56
	Integration of TM and MM will have positive impact on patient care	
Yes		65
No		35

Table 3: Opinion of Doctors on integrated medicine**DISCUSSION**

Ayurveda was the oldest traditional medicine which was practiced in India. The government of India has recognized and supported Ayurveda, Yoga, Naturopathy, Siddha, Unani and Homeopathy (AYUSH) as traditional Indian system of Medicine.[6,7] It has also supported the integration of traditional medicine with MM by doctors' ranked Ayurveda as most commonly practiced TM followed by Yoga, Homeopathy, Unani. This could be due to the fact that, Ayurveda is very popular term used as an alternative for TM. This observation was in contrast to the finding by previous study where use of homeopathy was most popular among doctors.[8] Another study done by Hasan et al. on the pharmacy students concluded that Homeopathy was the most commonly practiced TM in Malaysia.[9] The male doctors were more than females in our study, but majority of females accessed information on TM. This finding was consistent with the observation of earlier study which noted that female doctors had better acceptance of TM than males.[10]

In our study, we had more Residents (68) compared to Consultants (32) from various specialties. Many doctors (69%) felt TM is more accessible and cheaper compared to MM but in spite of this fact, majority (66%) opined that TM is not popular. We observed that, majority of the doctors who accessed TM agreed that it was used for chronic diseases not cured by MM, this reflects that those who were aware of the information believed in TM and thought it could be beneficial. One study also has reported that TM is used by doctors mainly for chronic conditions.[11]

Most doctors(60%) agreed that TMPs undergo minimum training before they start practice, only (37%) agreed that certain chronic conditions can be treated with TM. The main disadvantages of TM as opined by majority of modern medicine practitioners were practice of TM by untrained personals, inappropriate dose calculations, common drug toxicity and inadequate use of diagnostic techniques to diagnose the illness. These findings were similar to the other studies who also claimed that lack of scientific evidence and paucity in untrained professionals in TM, lack of financial assistance by the government were the major factors which hindered them from using TM.[12-16]

The doctors who access information on TM, treated patients referred from TMPs(80%), where as minority (20%) of practitioners did not wish to treat these patients. This shows majority of them wished to treat the ailments not cured or drug adversities due to TM.

Majority of doctors (66%) took history of TM usage by patient. This was contradicting the finding by earlier study where they did not elicit history of TM use by patients.[8]

Although 37% doctors recommended use of TM to their patients but very few (36%) actually advised TM for their patients. However, majority of them (69%) still supported integration of TM with MM. This finding coincides with the outcome of studies done in Ethiopia which showed that 50% of modern medicine practitioners supported integration of these two systems.[2]

Although few doctors (44%) had collaboration with TMPs, majority (65%) opined that integrated medicine will have positive impact on patient care. Studies done in developing countries in south east Asia suggest that integrated medicine can be a solution for chronic illness.[9,17,18] Many of modern medicine practitioners do not advice TM for their patients due to their unfamiliarity with TM.

Many countries have implemented TM sensitization programs in their medical curriculum.^[19] A few medical and pharmacy schools in US and Europe offer TM courses as a part of curriculum.^[20,21] This may advance their knowledge and belief in other therapeutic options available for patients other than Conventional medicine. Such sensitization programs may eventually improve the opinion of modern medicine practitioners on traditional medicine and pave a path towards integrated medicine. Since, this was a questionnaire-based study; the results are susceptible to recall bias, social desirability and Personalization. The attitude expressed is based on the individual practicing doctors from one confined area which limits projection of its finding to other population.

CONCLUSION

The modern medicine practitioners were aware of traditional medicine and majority of them access information about it. Many modern medicine practitioners do not encourage their patient to use TM due to their concern about the inadequacy of scientific evidence about the safety of TM and inadequate training of TMPs. However, they still encouraged integration of MM with TM to improve the health of population especially related to chronic conditions. All healthcare professionals should understand the Pros and Cons of other alternate medicines completely before labeling them useless and should encourage integration and work together to improve patient care as well as quality of life.

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