INCORPORATION OF COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE IN AN UNDERGRADUATE PHARMACY CURRICULUM

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Abstract

Despite the increasing use of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) worldwide, little is known about the factors associated with the interest in receiving CAM education among pharmacy undergraduate students in University of Malaya, Malaysia. The study aimed to describe pharmacy students’ interest for CAM education and determine factors, which predicted interest in receiving CAM education. A cross-sectional survey was conducted among all undergraduate pharmacy students in University of Malaya using a structured questionnaire and face-to-face interview. A logistic regression analysis was used to predict factors associated with the likelihood that students would report their interest in receiving CAM education. About 80% of the total 250 undergraduate pharmacy students wanted CAM to be incorporated into the pharmacy curriculum. Three factors predictive of an interest to receive CAM education were student's year of study, those who previously sought CAM information, and those who indicated that CAM should not be restricted to CAM practitioners. As future healthcare professionals, the incorporation of CAM education may provide a chance for students to have accurate and impartial information on CAM. Further research into the content and focus of CAM education is necessary to meet the educational needs of the future pharmacists.

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1. Introduction

Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) is readily available, affordable and perceived to be effective and safe (James & Bah, 2014). As CAM is increasingly used in both developed and developing countries, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has developed a strategy to support WHO Member States “to implement action plans to strengthen the role of traditional medicine to keep the populations healthy” (WHO, 2013). To be in line with the WHO’s strategy, the Ministry of Health Malaysia has gazetted the Traditional and Complementary Medicine ACT 2016 [ACT 775] for the regulation of CAM products and services in the country (MOH, 2016). All these developments have resulted in changing expectations about the need for healthcare professionals to be trained about CAM in Malaysia.

Faced with an increasing demand for information on CAM, patients expect healthcare professionals particularly pharmacists to discuss CAM usage and limitations as well as any possible side effects (Gaylord & Mann, 2007; Schjøtt & Erdal, 2014). However, one Australian study reported that less than 15% of community pharmacists were comfortable in answering questions regarding safety, interactions, and benefits of CAM. The majority of the pharmacists indicated that their training in CAM was inadequate to meet their needs in providing information regarding CAM use (Semple et al., 2006). It is clear that the need for a comprehensive CAM training for undergraduate pharmacy students is crucial (Fasinu, Bouic, & Rosenkranz, 2012). Besides providing students better understanding of CAM modalities, the addition of CAM modules may broaden their horizon to allow better acceptance and appreciation of the patient’s choice in achieving better health outcomes (Tiralongo & Wallis, 2008b).

The Institute of Medicine's Committee on the use of CAM by the American Public (2005) has recommended that curricula for healthcare professionals incorporate elements about CAM so that they can competently advise patients about safe and alternatives of CAM to maintain and improve health. Similarly, the Pharmacy Board of Malaysia, the body that governs the accreditation and recognition of pharmacy degree programmes has outlined the requirement for curricular elements of CAM for undergraduate pharmacy education programme (Pharmacy Board Malaysia, 2007). Surveys involving pharmacy schools in the US found that the majority of the schools offered some form of CAM training in the curriculum which was primarily offered as electives (Dutta, Daftary, Egba, & Kang, 2003; Scaleitta, Ghelani, & Sunny, 2017). Currently, CAM courses are also common in the curricula of pharmacy students in Canada (Johnson et al., 2008) and European countries (Barberis, de Toni, Schiavone, Zicca, & Ghio, 2001).

Surveys done in the US (Noureldin & Blake, 2011), Australia and New Zealand (Tiralongo & Wallis, 2008a; Tiralongo, 2013) and Pakistan (Hussain et al., 2012) showed that generally pharmacy students showed a positive attitude towards the use of CAM and perceived CAM as a core and integral part of their professional degree. The increasing focus on CAM and the widespread incorporation of CAM into pharmacy curricula, make it essential to gain insights into the views and factors associated with interest to receiving CAM education among the undergraduate pharmacy students in Malaysia. Thus, the study aimed to investigate the proportion of pharmacy students who are interested in CAM education and to identify factors, which predicted this interest.