

Factors affecting the use of complementary and alternative medicine among Japanese university students

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Background: Patients suffering from intractable diseases and individuals seeking relief from mild symptoms resort to treatments outside the modern medical paradigm, such as complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). In order to improve doctor–patient communication about CAM, it is essential to evaluate CAM usage among social groups likely to choose it in the future. Therefore, we aimed to evaluate how university students – individuals highly subject to future CAM usage – perceive CAM and the factors affecting their choice of CAM use.

Methods: We conducted a questionnaire survey with 1,096 Japanese university students not studying medical subjects.

Results: The term CAM was known to 11% of the subjects. Modalities they most associated with CAM were art therapy (353 subjects), hot spring therapy (349), and aromatherapy (345). They had experience taking vitamins, trace elements, other supplements (498), and nutritional drinks (483). Several subjects wanted to experience shiatsu massage (373) and hot spring therapy (303). Multiple regression analysis of the modalities that the subjects wanted to experience revealed a 42% multiple coefficient of determination for prioritizing modalities that the subject associated with CAM, showing a large contribution of this deciding factor.

Conclusions: Although most subjects were not familiar with the term CAM, many of them had decided to ingest substances in the CAM category on the basis of self-judgment and without adequate knowledge. Because such behavior can be detrimental to health, medical professionals should be aware of CAM usage among their patients and seek effective communication with them in order to enable safe CAM practice.

Keywords: aromatherapy; art therapy; complementary and alternative medicine modality; hot spring therapy; shiatsu massage