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ATTITUDE TOWARDS COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE AMONG MEDICAL STUDENTS IN SRI LANKA: A PILOT STUDY

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Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) can be defined as a group of diverse medical and health care systems, practices, and products that is not generally considered a part of conventional medicine. The World Health Organization classifies 65-80% of the world's health care services as 'traditional medicine'. Due to the high use of CAM, it is likely that CAM therapy might become a major component of mainstream health care in the future. Knowledge and attitudes of the medical students towards CAM are important since those might influence their future practice of medicine. In developed countries, students have consistently expressed interest in gaining more exposure to CAM, and medical schools are trying to accommodate that part of the education in their curricula to meet the student demands.

The aim of the present study was to determine the attitudes towards CAM based therapies with regard to their future clinical practice in 2nd year medical students, Faculty of Medicine, University of Peradeniya using a questionnaire. Bivariate statistical analysis was used with chi-square test of independence to analyze the data and a P value of <0.05 was considered as statistically significant.

CAM was felt to be a useful supplement to regular medicine by 51.7% of participants and only 18% disagreed with it. According to 70.5% of participants, CAM includes ideas and methods from which conventional medicine could benefit and 4.1% said otherwise. Seventy seven percent of participants agreed that medical practitioners should have some knowledge about the most common CAM therapies and 62.3% said knowledge about CAM is important for their future clinical practice. Some participants showed willingness to deliver certain procedures like acupuncture (81.1%) and ayurveda treatment (68%) provided they have adequate knowledge. The results of the current study revealed that 2nd year medical students have more positive attitudes towards CAM.

Students were enthusiastic about learning specific CAM practices to be able to advise patients about CAM, refer patients for CAM, and in some cases provide several options in their future practices. Taken together this pilot study suggests that the medical students' attitudes show a favourable inclination towards gaining knowledge about the CAM therapies.

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