Patterns, Magnitude and Determinants of Using Complementary Medicine in Three Arab Countries

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Objective: To assess the patterns, magnitude and determinants of using complementary medicine and a medicine (CAM) in some Arab communities.

Subjects and Methods: This study was conducted in three Arab countries, i.e., Egypt, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and United Arab Emirates (UAE). The study areas were: the rural health unit in Rawafei El-Qusair (RQ), Sohag Governorate, Primary Health Care Department, King Faisal Hospital, Khamis Mushayt City (KM), KSA and El-Roda Primary Health Care Center, Abu Dhabi (AD), UAE. A total of 1184 participants in RO, 714 participants in KM and 546 in AD were interviewed. A study questionnaire was designed to collect data from the study settings. It included some sociodemographic variables and questions on seeking for consultation(s) at a non-licensed traditional healer (TH) within the last year.

Results: More than one third of participants from Egypt used some forms of traditional medicines within the past 12 months (37.3%), compared with almost one fourth of participants from KSA (23.7%) and UAE (24%). Religious and spiritual healers constituted the main consulted THs in Egypt, KSA and UAE (85.3%, 74.5% and 68%, respectively). The complaints of TM users were mainly neuropsychiatric(61.8%,49.1%and 56.5%, respectively). Main reason for consulting THs was having supernatural complaints (34.2%, 38.5% and 33.6%, respectively). In all study areas, patients did not discuss their traditional therapies with their PHC physicians. Moreover, there were no single form of collaboration or communication between the conventional health care providers and the THs. The complaints were ameliorated in more than one third of participants (44.8%, 41.4% and 39.7%, respectively) while deterioration of the complaints occurred in less than one fourth of participants (12.9%,23.7% and 23.7%, respectively). More than half of participants were satisfied with the service provided by THs (54.5%, 57.4% and 57.3%, respectively). In RO, the older and less educated the participant, the significantly more he/she would use TM/CAM. In KM, married and less educated participants were significantly more users of TM/CAM. In AD, the older the participant, the significantly more he/she would use TM/CAM.

Conclusions: Rates of using complementary medicine are high in Arab communities. Religious persons are the most commonly consulted THs. Psychiatric/neurological symptoms are the main presenting complaints that necessitate consulting THs.

Keywords: Complementary therapies, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, primary health care, epidemiologic Factors, Hospitals-Religious, Diagnostic techniques-neurological, diagnosis-dual (psychiatry).

Abbreviations:
CAM: Complementary and alternative medicine
TH: Traditional healer
TM: Traditional Medicine
AD: Abu Dhabi
KM: Khamis Mushayt City

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INTRODUCTION

Traditional medicine (TM) refers to health practices, approaches, knowledge and beliefs incorporating plant, animal and mineral based medicines, spiritual therapies, manual techniques and exercises, applied singularly or in combination to treat, diagnose and prevent illnesses or maintain well-being. On the other hand, complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) therapy is one that is used instead of ("alternative") or in addition to ("complementary") the conventional accepted therapy for a condition (*Hoffer, 2003*). Simply, TM/CAM constitute any treatment or therapy that is not routinely and universally available to patients via the national health care system. These definitions are often blurred, and the list of what is considered to be CAM changes as therapies that are proven to be safe and effective are adopted into conventional medicine (*Ernest, 2002*). *Pray (2006)* defined quackery as when an untrue or misleading health claim is deliberately, fraudulently, or pretentiously made for a food, drug, device or cosmetic. Sometimes, the term 'unproven medications' is being used instead. Unproven medications are those for which supporting data