

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Physiatrists' Perspective on Traditional and Complementary Medicine

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Abstract

Objective: Traditional and complementary medicine (TCM) is becoming more common worldwide. In this study, we aimed to evaluate the perspectives of physiatrists' in Turkey regarding TCM methods.

Methods: A 24-question survey form was prepared which physiatrists were asked to fill out on a voluntary basis via the internet.

Results: A total of 150 physicians participated in the study 53.3% of which had TCM training. We found that specialist physicians attended TCM courses significantly more than professors or associate professors. The most preferred TCM courses were prolotherapy, ozone, and mesotherapy. 19.3% of the participants stated that they do not recommend TCM methods to their patients. The lack of scientific evidence was the main reason for not recommending it. A positive response to the inclusion of TCM in the PMR residency curriculum was supported by 90% of the participants.

Conclusion: Concerning the use of TCM methods, scientific basis is important to physicians. The efficiency and reliability of TCM methods must be proven with quality studies to be conducted on this subject.

Keywords: Traditional Medicine, Complementary Medicine, Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, Residency Curriculum

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, traditional and complementary medicine (TCM) methods have become popular among both doctors and patients worldwide. The World Health Organization (WHO) defined traditional medicine as "the sum total of knowledge, skill, and practices based on the theories, beliefs, and experiences indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illness". Complementary medicine was defined as "a broad set of health care practices that are not part of that country's own tradition or conventional medicine and are not fully integrated into the dominant health care system".

For a treatment or a procedure to be used in Western medicine, a serious scientific background is required. Lack of adequate scientific evidence for TCM methods causes many doctors to not take these practices seriously resulting in TCM being performed by non-physicians. The fact that these treatment methods are taught to physicians under the supervision of the Ministry of Health in Turkey is important from two aspects. The first point is to

prevent the use of TCM practices by those other than physicians and the second is to seek evidence of TCM effectiveness through scientific studies.

One of the most common uses of TCM practices is for chronic pain treatment. This study aimed to evaluate the perspectives of physiatrists' who are most concerned with chronic pain, on TCM practices.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study design

The survey includes three parts. The first part of the questionnaire asked about the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants: gender, age, years of experience as a physiatrists, and participant's title. The second part of the questionnaire asked whether the participant had any TCM training, if the participant received training what training they received, whether they recommended TCM to patients, and where they followed up-to-date information on the subject. We also asked about the participant's most trusted TCM methods and the contribution of these methods to patient satisfaction. If the participant did not receive TCM training and did not recommend it to patients, the reason why was asked. In the third part of the survey, the participant



was asked if they would like to receive more training and their opinion on including TCM in the PMR resident training program. We also asked about security concerns regarding TCM methods.

Ethical consideration

Approval for the study was obtained from the local ethical committee.

Statistical analysis

Statistical analysis was performed using MedCalc software (version 16.2.1; MedCalc Software, Ostend, Belgium). Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and frequency) were reported. Categorical data were given as counts (n) and percentages (%). Categorical variables were compared using the Chi-square test. Results were evaluated at a significance level of $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS

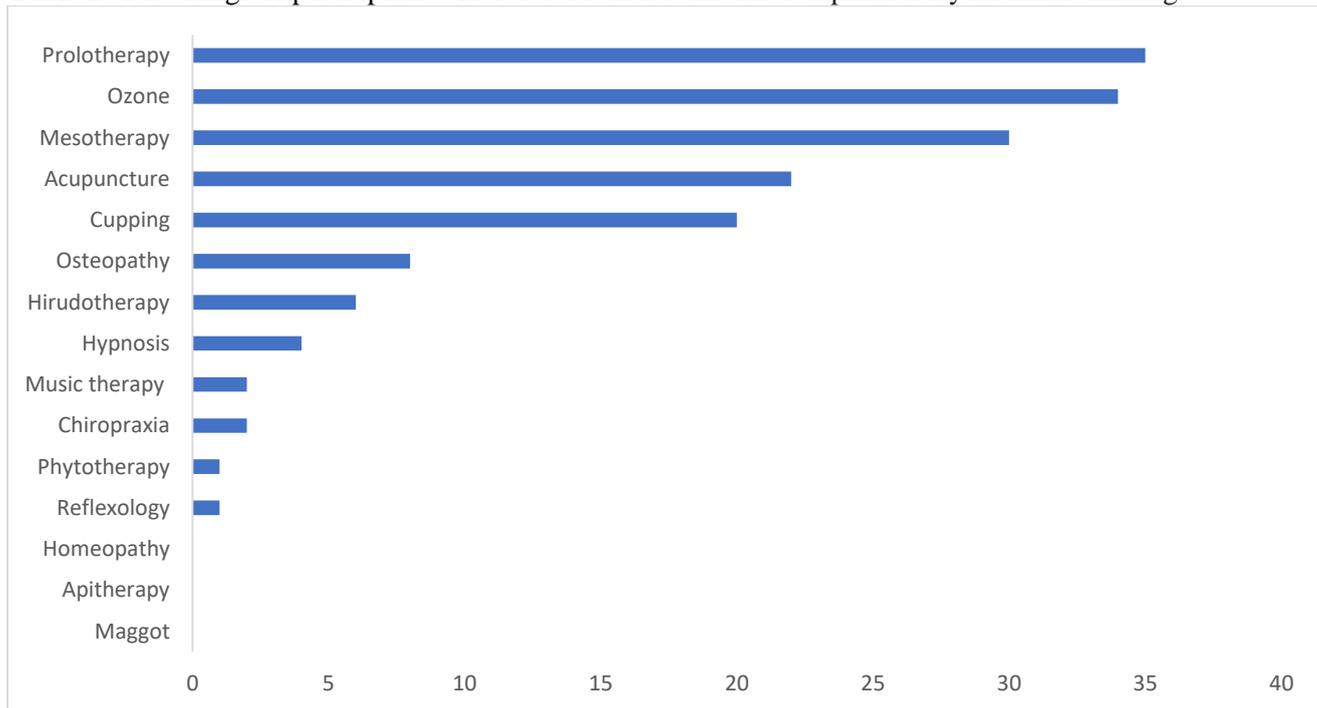
Between November 1-30, 2020, 150 physicians participated in our survey. The demographic data and characteristics of participants are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The demographic data and characteristics of participants

Gender	Female: 80% Male : 20%
Age	Under 30 :16.7% Between 30-35: 18.7% Between 35-45: 50% Between 45-55: 10% Over 55: 4.7%
Title of participants	Residency: 16% Specialist: 55.3% Assistant professor :5.3% Associate professor:16% Professor: 7.3%

Of the total participants, 53.3% had TCM training and most (78.2%) had taken this training through private courses. It was found that specialist physicians (63.8%) attended these courses significantly more than associate professors (45.8%) and professors (36.6%) ($p = 0.0172$). The five most preferred TCM courses were prolotherapy (46.7%), ozone (45.3%), mesotherapy (40%), acupuncture (29.3%), and cupping (26.7%) (Table 2).

Table 2. Percentage of participants who received traditional and complementary medicine trainings



Of the participants, 25.3% stated that they were not interested in TCM and they had not received information from any source on the subject. Of the participants who were interested in TCM, 54.7% stated that they obtained information from scientific publications and 56.7% from healthcare team members. Of the participants who recommended

TCM methods to their patients, 72% defined the contribution of TCM practices to patient satisfaction as effective or very effective. A total of 37.3% of the physicians recommend TCM methods after physical therapy sessions, 39.3% during physical therapy sessions, and 4% before physical therapy sessions, while 19.3% stated that



they never recommended TCM methods to their patients. The most common reason for not recommending TCM methods was the lack of sufficient scientific evidence regarding the efficacy and safety of TCM methods (Table 3). No participant who received TCM training thought it ineffective and did not recommend it to their patients.

Table 3. The reasons for not recommending traditional and complementary medicine (TCM) methods

Reasons for not recommending TCM methods to patients	Lack of sufficient scientific evidence on the effectiveness and reliability of TCM methods 78.8 %
	Lack of knowledge 42.4 %
	Disbelief in TCM methods 33.3%
	Finding it risky for health 39.4%
	concern about substitution of conventional therapy 27.3%

However, 70% of the participants stated that they would like to be able to do TCM applications with more training, 12% did not want it, and 18% were undecided. While only one of the residents (4%) stated that they did not want to be educated in TCM methods, this rate was found to be 54.5% for professors.

When asked whether psychiatrists should have TCM practices in the residency training program, 90% of the participants expressed a positive opinion. When asked if TCM practices performed by physicians threaten public health, 91% of the participants expressed a negative opinion, while 14% of the participants stated that TCM practices are a placebo. A total of 39% of respondents agreed with our suggestion that TCM practices are natural, safe, and have very few side effects, while 46% partially agreed, and 15% disagreed. While 19% of the participants stated that they do not intend to perform TCM practices on their patients, 33% stated that they would not like it if patients had TCM practices without asking their physician.

DISCUSSION

The Turkish Ministry of Health published the “Traditional and Complementary Medicine Practices Regulation” in 2014 ¹. According to this regulation, acupuncture, ozone, osteopathy, mesotherapy,

prolotherapy, hypnosis, hirudotherapy, reflexology, homeopathy, phytotherapy, chiropractic treatment, maggot therapy, apitherapy, cupping, and music therapy were accepted as TCM practices. After 2014, TCM training for physicians started in centers affiliated with the Ministry of Health. TCM practices are used all over the world. According to the WHO, the frequency of TCM practices for any reason is 80% in Africa, 70% in Canada, 49% in France, and 42% in the USA , In Turkey, the most common reason for using TCM practices is for pain, at a usage frequency of 42%-70% ². According to our study, 78% of psychiatrists recommend TCM methods to their patients. The most recommended methods are acupuncture, prolotherapy, ozone, mesotherapy, and cupping. It is not surprising that prolotherapy and mesotherapy are among the most recommended methods because these two methods are very similar to the soft tissue injections frequently performed by psychiatrists and cupping therapy has similarities to vacuum devices that are used with interferential current. In a study conducted with anesthesiologists, it was reported that the most reliable methods were acupuncture, ozone and hypnosis, respectively ³.

In a study conducted in a physical therapy clinic, it was found that 12% of patients tried TCM at least once ⁴. In this study, the most preferred methods were found to be cupping, acupuncture, and hirudotherapy. In another study conducted in Turkey, in which 219 patients with degenerative osteoarthritis were included, it was found that 35.6% of the patients sought TCM applications ⁵. In a study conducted with 839 patients, in which the traditional and complementary methods used were questioned, balneotherapy and herbal supplements were the most common while cupping, hirudotherapy, and acupuncture were determined as the most preferred TCM methods ⁶. In this study, it was determined that 68% of cupping was performed by non-educated people.

Although TCM practices have been used by patients for years, they have only recently become popular among physicians. The biggest advantage of having these practices performed by physicians is that it allows patients to seek treatment at hospitals. Thus, these treatments can be applied by professionals with the method most appropriate for the patient/condition. We found in our study that the main reason TCM applications were not recommended by physicians was due to the lack of scientific evidence on this subject. The fact that more physicians are starting to be involved in this practice and participate in training will result in an increase in quality scientific studies. Of the participants in our

survey, 70% stated that they want to get more training on TCM methods. We found that specialist physicians, who examined the most patients, attended TCM training more than other groups. This may be due to the fact that physicians seek alternatives for drug-dependent patients with chronic pain that do not respond to modern medical methods. Also, 90% of the participants stated that TCM training should be included in the PMR resident training curriculum, which was surprisingly high. In a study, 94.2 % of medical faculty students stated that sufficient training was not given about TCM methods at the medical school ⁷.

The emergence of PMR expertise in the world was developed on the ideas of "wholeness", "functionality", and "quality of life". Learning the art of medicine implementation should be one of the focal points of residency training. Current medicine and residency training are mainly for isolated pathologies and specific treatment methods. Perhaps the most important point we can teach residents is to "think globally, act locally" ^{8,9}. In this framework, it would be beneficial to include TCM methods in the residency curriculum.

CONCLUSION

Patients in our country have been using TCM methods for a long time. With the increasing popularity of this method among healthcare professionals, it will pave the way for advances in evidence-based medicine.

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Study limitations

A limitation of this study is the small number of participants. There are estimated to be about 3500 PMR residents and specialists in Turkey. A larger survey with more participants would be beneficial. The fact that the survey was related to TCM methods may have negatively affected the participation rate. While TCM methods are highly praised by some physicians despite the lack of scientific evidence, this situation also causes negative reactions in some physicians. In this regard, we think that physiatrists have two important duties: first of all, and perhaps most importantly, they should learn about this subject and ensure that this work is done by trained physicians in hospitals or health institutions, and secondly, quality studies should be conducted on this subject to allow for TCM evaluation in the presence of scientific evidence.

The importance of this work lies in the fact that to our knowledge, this is the first study that investigated the perspective of physiatrists on TCM methods.

Declarations

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