

Original Article

Use of Alternative Medicine for Chronic Hepatitis C-A Hospital Based Study from Rawalpindi


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ABSTRACT

Objective: To assess the prevalence of alternative treatment in Chronic Hepatitis C patients.

Patients and Methods: Face to face interviews were conducted with 78 patients presenting in Liver Clinic of Holy Family Hospital, Rawalpindi using a structured questionnaire.

Results: Out of 78 patients, 58% were female and 42% were male. Mean age was 43 years. Fifty one percent were illiterate with average monthly household income of Rs. 3000-7000. Seventy-seven percent (n=60) of the patients claimed using alternative medicine for hepatitis at some stage during illness. Use of Quranic verses (Dam/Darood) was the most prevalent (75%, n=50), followed by Hakim (45%, n=27) and Homeopathic (43%, n=26) medicines. The major reasons cited for using alternative medicine were high cost of conventional medicine (67%), followed by recommendations from other patients. Fifty percent people believed in the effectiveness of alternative medicine and 25%


doubted the efficacy of conventional treatment. Sixty-five percent claimed using a combination of alternative and conventional therapy and 67% had not informed their doctor about its concurrent use.

**Conclusion:** Doctors need to be aware of all therapeutic modalities used by their patients to prevent any drug interactions. The cost of medical treatment for hepatitis was found to be the greatest obstacle in obtaining conventional treatment. The treatment seeking behavior is influenced by hearsay, advice from other patients and the community. (Rawal Med J 2009;34:102-104).

**Key Words:** Alternative medicine, chronic hepatitis, treatment modalities.

**INTRODUCTION**

Complementary and Alternative medicine (CAM) refers to those therapeutic and diagnostic disciplines that exist largely outside the institutions where conventional health care is provided.\(^1\) According to one estimate, >80% of the developing world's population still depends on the complementary and alternative systems of medicine, while about half of the population in industrialized countries use CAM.\(^2\) Common alternative modalities include Ayurveda, herbal medicine, healing, acupuncture and homeopathy.\(^1\) These are used in a number of diseases from fever and nausea\(^3\) to serious diseases like cancers\(^4\) and hepatitis.\(^5\) Interest in and use of CAM in the treatment of chronic liver diseases (CLD) has increased in the past decade. However, this has not been supported by a significant increase in sound clinical research evidence for their efficacy.\(^5\) Studies are being carried out to assess its efficacy, safety and interaction with other drugs.\(^6\)
Pakistan is a developing country with a population of 156.26 million. Majority (66%) lives in rural areas. Government spends a meager amount on health sector with the total expenditure on health being 2.4-3.7% of GDP. Health facilities are scarce and that too are concentrated in the big cities. The doctor to population ratio is one doctor per 1287 people. Most of the people are unable to meet the health expenses, as 23.9% of the population lives below the poverty line. All this combined with low literacy, cultural beliefs and practices often lead to self care, home remedies and consultation with traditional healers in rural community. The use of alternative medicine by patients suffering from CLD is a prevalent practice in Pakistan as HCV infection is the most common cause of CLD in Pakistan, with a 6% seroprevalence in general population of Pakistan. This study aims to ascertain the frequency and pattern of use of alternative medicine in Pakistani patients with chronic hepatitis C presenting to a tertiary care hospital in Rawalpindi, Pakistan.

**PATIENTS AND METHODS**

This was a cross-sectional study in which face-to-face interviews based on a structured questionnaire were conducted with 78 randomly chosen patients having chronic hepatitis C presenting to the Gastroenterology and Hepatology Section of Holy Family Hospital, Rawalpindi, Pakistan, between January 2007 and October 2007. The questionnaire had both open ended and closed ended questions. The questionnaire was pre tested on a convenient sample of ten patients at a similar setting. This helped in modifying the questions to their final form. Verbal informed consent was taken from the respondents. After collecting information regarding the demographic profile, respondents were asked
about the first treatment modality used for the hepatitis C and the subsequent modalities used. Questions regarding their source of information about a particular modality and the reasons for using it were asked. Multiple options were allowed in these questions.

RESULTS

Among the respondents, 58% (n=45) were female and 42% (n=33) were male. Mean age was 43 years. Majority of them (51%) were illiterate with average monthly household income of Rs. 3000-7000. Seventy-seven percent (n=60) of the patients claimed using alternative medicine for hepatitis at some stage during illness. Use of Quranic verses (Dam/ Darood/ Spiritual healing) was the most prevalent (75%, n=50) followed by Hakim (45%, n=27) and Homeopathic (43%, n=26) medicines. The use of the most prevalent alternative modality i.e Dam Darood decreased with increasing level of education and rising monthly household income (table 1).

The major reasons cited for using alternative medicine were high cost of conventional medicine (67%) followed by recommendations from other patients. Fifty percent people believed in the effectiveness of alternative medicine and 25% doubted the efficacy of conventional treatment. Thirteen percent feared the adverse effects of medical therapy.

Table 1. Use of alternative medicine with education and monthly household income.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Status</th>
<th>Use of Dam/ Darood % users</th>
<th>Monthly Household Income Rs.</th>
<th>Use of Dam/ Darood % users</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Formal Education</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>Less than 3000</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>3000-7000</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>7001-10,000</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>Above 10,000</td>
<td>39.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate and above</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The major source of information for alternative medicine was friends and family (83%) followed by advice of other patients (40%). TV and radio was quoted as a source of information by 12% of the respondents. 65% claimed using a combination of alternative and conventional therapy and majority of them (67%) had not informed their doctor about its concurrent use.

DISCUSSION

More than two thirds of the study participants had used alternative modalities at some point of their illness. In a study from US, 74% of the patients of CLD reported using alternative treatment modalities, with 38% patients from Taiwan used alternative medicine. The commonest modality used by patients in this study was Quranic verses/dam darood or the spiritual healing. This corresponds to the cultural and religious beliefs of the population. Alternative therapies have been utilized by people having faith in spiritual healers, clergymen, hakeems, homeopaths or even many quacks. These are the first choice for problems such as infertility, epilepsy, psychosomatic troubles and depression. Multiple repetition of certain Quranic verses for an extended periods of time (weeks or months), called “Wazifa”, is another popular method of religious healing. The other commonly used modalities are Hakeem and homeopathy. The use of these modalities corresponds to those reported in a previous study on chronic Hepatitis C patients in Rawalpindi.

High cost of conventional therapy is reported as the main cause for using alternative modalities. It is no doubt one of the major hurdles in seeking appropriate health care in Pakistan. Other reasons are the advice and pressure of the community and the belief in
alternative modalities.\textsuperscript{20} The use of spiritual healing decreased with the increasing level of education and monthly household income. In study, the use of alternative medicine was not associated with gender, family income, education and occupation.\textsuperscript{19} In another study, women, those with higher education, divorced and widows were those who more frequently used CAM.\textsuperscript{25} Similarly, Tovey et al showed that people with higher education were less likely to use Hakeems as a form of treatment.\textsuperscript{4}

About two third of the study participants were using a combination of both conventional and alternative modalities and they had not informed their doctor about its concurrent use. This percentage (67\%) corresponds to study by Yang et al where 64\% had not informed their doctor.\textsuperscript{19} This is much higher than the American study where 26\% had not informed their doctor.\textsuperscript{18} This communication barrier augments the risk of developing complications from the combination of allopathic and alternative therapy.\textsuperscript{20} This study was conducted on a convenient sample of chronic Hepatitis C patients at a tertiary care medical facility, it cannot be truly representative of trends of alternative medicine usage for chronic hepatitis in the community. Further large scale studies evaluating the different alternative modalities used and their possible effects on the patients of Chronic Hepatitis need to be carried out. In conclusion, the use of CAM is common in patients of Chronic Hepatitis C, mainly due to high cost of conventional therapy and hearsay. Doctors need to be aware of all the treatment modalities used by their patients.

\textbf{REFERENCES}


