

MONASH UNIVERSITY STUDY

A survey conducted by Monash University PHD Candidate, Anske Robinson, provided some interesting results in the use of complementary and alternative therapies. This article is a brief summary of the result to date.

There were 459 people that responded to the survey distributed in July and August 2005. This was 40% of people who were sent the survey, which was sent to a mixture of seven rural and metropolitan places. Approximately half of the people that replied to this survey were currently using at least one complementary or alternative medicine therapy. The total was raised to 85% when people that were currently using a therapy and those that had used one in the past were added together.

The answers to many of the questions included in the survey indicated that many people have a positive attitude towards complimentary and alternative medicine, and a desire to use natural remedies. They also believe that doctors do not always give patients sufficient time, information and care, and they have less faith in medical science than those people that indicated they were not interested in complementary or alternative therapies.

People used complementary and alternative medicines because they had aches and pains, chronic health conditions that doctors were not able to heal, or they wanted to ensure they kept fit and well. People chose to use particular complementary or alternative medicines because the therapies chosen would assist with their particular health problem.

For instance, people with back ache used a chiropractor, and people with muscular pain went to a massage therapist or Bowen therapist, while people looking for stress relief also went to a massage therapist, or used yoga or meditation. The health problems the people that responded to this survey had were very consistent with the modalities used.

Women under the age of 60 were much more likely to use complementary or alternative therapies than men. The people that used complementary or alternative medicine were also much more likely to have tertiary level education. In particular, they were much more likely to be users of the therapies where natural remedies are prescribed, such as naturopathy, homeopathy, Chinese medicine and herbalists, and the therapies that focus on the mind as well as the body, such as yoga, meditation and Reiki.

Interviews were held with 22 chiropractors, massage therapists, naturopaths and homeopaths. The information received from these practitioners was quite consistent and confirmed and added to the information from the survey. People seek out complementary or alternative medicine practitioners for wellbeing, or because they have illnesses that doctors cannot assist with and as one naturopath stated, "Because they are sick and tired of modern medicine".

Women are much more proactive in their use of CAM. They are higher users of complementary and alternative medicines. However, once men experience what therapies have to offer, they are just as likely to continue.

Many of the users are concerned about the drugs prescribed by doctors, and seek alternative ways of dealing with their health problems. Communication is very important and CAM consultations are often lengthy, particularly, first consultations allowing for the need for information to be exchanged and provide as needed. Many people are also bringing information from the Internet, though this appeared to be more patients attending naturopaths and homeopaths.

While men may sometime seek information that indicated there is scientific evidence for the therapies provided, again particularly the remedies prescribed by naturopaths and homeopaths, the patient generally seem to be much more interested in whether the therapies assist with their health problems. An understanding of their health problems, empathy, was also important for patients.

The lack of knowledge by many doctors about complementary and alternative medicines, and their reluctance to integrate their use was also a common theme. Doctors do not often suggest to their patients that they use complementary or alternative therapies that may be of benefit.

The results indicating that doctors need to communicate much better with their patients about complementary or alternative medicine were presented at a Holistic Conference in August 2005. Currently articles for publication in medical journals are also being written. They provide information about why people are using specific complementary or alternative therapies, and the information sources from which users of complementary and alternative therapists obtain information. Further information will be available late 2006 as the results from the study continue to be analysed.

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