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ABSTRACT

Exploring the Use of Complementary and Alternative Medicine for Treatment and Prevention of Flu

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Background: Complementary and Alternative Medicines (CAM) could be a viable option in treating influenza pandemics, especially as stockpiling antivirals can be expensive and developing effective vaccines for influenza is challenging due to frequent changes in virus antigenic structures, making it difficult for ongoing research. CAM practices and remedies are a promising and affordable option that prioritizes a holistic approach to health. Although the effectiveness of CAM can differ, their use is increasing globally. However, there is a lack of research on how CAM is used for influenza prevention and treatment among Palestinians.

Objectives: To identify the prevalence of Palestinians who use CAM for flu prevention and treatment, the most frequently utilized CAM products for this purpose, the leading sources that promote CAM use during flu season, and the reasons for CAM use. Further, to evaluate how CAM usage affects the intake of influenza vaccinations among adults.

Methods: A cross-sectional online survey was carried out among adults aged 18 years and older. The questionnaire covered socio-demographic variables, clinical characteristics, vaccination status, health status, types and frequency of CAM used patients' sources of information, causes of their usage, attitudes, and beliefs. The data analysis included descriptive and multivariate regression analyses to explore the connections between patient sociodemographic and clinical characteristics and CAM



usage. All analyses were conducted using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 27.0.

Results: Out of 386 participants who were approached, 363 (94.05%) completed the survey, resulting in a response rate of 94%. Among the participants, 245(67.7%) were female, 34(9.4%) got the flu vaccine this year and 274 (75%) used at least one method of CAM for treating and preventing the flu. The majority of participants 239 (65%) used at least one herb for treatment of flu and prevention, with Sage being the most commonly reported herb 162(44.8%), followed by chamomile (40.9%) and anise 144(39.8%). Vitamin D was the most widely used biologically-based therapy for flu treatment and prevention (31.8%). Additionally, 230 (63.4%) used CAM to enhance their immune system. A significant percentage of respondents (between 36.5% and 42.3%) believed that vitamin C and vitamin D intake could boost immunity and reduce the risk of respiratory infections. Participants primarily obtained information about CAM from friends and family (247, 67.7%) and the internet (233, 64.2%). Moreover, 203 (56%) perceived the effectiveness of CAM compared to conventional medicine to vary depending on the specific health condition or situation.

Conclusions: CAM products are commonly used to prevent and treat the flu. Understanding the degree to which people of Palestine rely on CAM products as a remedy for treatment and/or prevention of influenza is critical for the public, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers. The study's results can raise awareness, improve medical practice, guide policy-making, and advance research in CAM use for various health conditions.

Keywords: CAM, Vaccine, Flu, Herbal, Palestine.