Is there a need for CAM education in health care professionals training programs in the digital era?

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Abstract

Introduction: In spite of the exponentially increasing interest and use of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) among patients over the previous decades in Croatia, there are still no data about the attitudes and beliefs of health care professionals in Croatia about the possibility and necessity to incorporate CAM into traditional medical education. Patients are trapped into ideological and professional disputes between the majority of allopathic establishment and CAM advocates and promoters or/and CAM practitioners and forced to seek help in both systems surrounded with health care professionals without sufficient knowledge to advise them which way to go.

Methods: The study was conducted on a sample of 569 participants (173 nurses, 312 physiotherapists and 84 sanitary engineers) by using a random sample method from the total number of enrolled students at the University of Applied Health Sciences in Zagreb in the academic year 2017/2018. The sample represented one fifth of the total number of students enrolled in the observed period. Among 569 participants there were 138 male and 431 females. The average age was 23.7 ± 6.51 years.

Results: Sample analysis has shown that 58.52% of the participants themselves, or some of their family members, have used one of the methods at least once in their lifetime; 65.38% of the participants confirmed that they met at least one patient who used one of the CAM methods; 66.96% of the participants confirmed that if they were seriously ill they would be ready to seek help from a CAM therapist; 72.04% of the participants confirmed that they would be interested in CAM if such training was organized. Only 22.8% of the participants confirmed that during their previous training in the field of health care through verified curricula they were informed about various CAM topics. 59.7% of the participants agreed about the academic allopathic society not having any knowledge about CAM and CAM not being included in the training programs for health care professionals. At the same time, 39.7% of participants expressed their need to obtain formal education in CAM. 61.7% of all participants would like to acquire sufficient knowledge through formal education programs so that the interested patient could be properly informed about the possibilities of application and effectiveness of CAM. The majority of participants (56.9%) have expressed positive attitudes about incorporating CAM into the curricula through supporting the statement that CAM should be integrated into various classical health care facilities (from anatomy to internal medicine and health care) to all the levels of education, both theoretically and practically.

Discussion and conclusions: The truth is that in the official nursing curriculum there is not a single word about the CAM philosophical background, practical use or research data. Health care professionals perceived that they had very little knowledge of complementary and alternative medicine, but they seek organized education within regular university curricula and the advocate for the integration of CAM education into the training programs for health care professionals in Croatia. Setting educational standards and developing consistent curricula for CAM will help students emerge from academic programs prepared for safe and effective practice and with skills to evaluate the effectiveness and participate in the research on CAM therapies.

Keywords: complementary and alternative medicine, health care professionals, attitudes, integration, training programs