

# HEALTH-CARE PROVIDERS' PERSPECTIVES ON TRADITIONAL AND COMPLEMENTARY ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE OF CHILDHOOD CANCER IN KENYA

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose.** Traditional and Complementary Alternative Medicine (TCAM) use is on the rise globally. In many African countries use of TCAM has been a way of life as first and last resort remedy for many ailments including cancer. Health-care providers (hcp) should address this need properly. This study explores hcp perspectives on TCAM in Kenya. Personal experience with TCAM, health beliefs, components of TCAM, recommending or discouraging TCAM, communication between hcp, parents and TCAM-practitioners, and knowledge of TCAM were assessed.

**Methods.** This cross-sectional study used semi-structured questionnaires. Hcp involved in the care of children with cancer at a Kenyan academic hospital were interviewed between July and October 2014.

**Results.** In total, 155 hcp (response rate 79%) participated. Only 18% of hcp describe their view on TCAM as positive. Yet, most hcp (85%) use TCAM themselves. More doctors (90%) than other hcp (56%) think that chemotherapy can cure cancer ( $P<0.001$ ). Combination of TCAM and chemotherapy is the best way to cure cancer according to 33% of hcp. Usefulness of TCAM is underestimated in conventional medicine (56%). Self-prayer is regarded as most effective (58%) and safe (76%). Most harmful are witchcraft (80%), herbal medicine (69%), and scarification (68%). Most hcp think their knowledge about safety and efficacy of TCAM is inadequate (71%). Parents should receive guidance about beneficial or harmful effects of TCAM (97%). Hcp think that their cancer patients use TCAM (97%) and that it is important that parents inform them about this (97%). However, only 5% of hcp always openly discuss TCAM with parents. Communication between doctors and TCAM-practitioners currently never takes place (67%), yet is required (91%).

**Conclusions.** Hcp need to improve their knowledge of TCAM and facilitate open communication about TCAM with families so parents feel safe to discuss their interest in it.

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