

ARTICLES

Provision and Access to Information on Complementary and Alternative Medicine: What are the Existing Knowledge Gaps among Users and Practitioners?

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Abstract

Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) usage is increasing in both developed and developing countries. CAM is comprised of medical systems, practices, interventions, applications, theories or claims that are not currently part of the conventional (Western) medical system. It is however acknowledged that many users of CAM are less informed about the benefits and possible side effects they are likely to encounter while using such health care system. This is partly attributed to inadequate documented information and uniformalised channels for information and knowledge sharing on complementary and alternative medicine. A systematic literature review was conducted to examine the current trend of CAM usage as well as provision and accessibility of CAM-related information in order to identify the existing knowledge gaps among CAM practitioners and users. Recommendations on how to address the existing knowledge gaps are provided.

Keywords: Alternative medicine, complementary medicine, information seeking behaviour, developing countries.

Introduction

Increasingly, there is a myriad of health challenges around the world arising from infectious and non-infectious diseases. This trend has partly been attributed to global climate change favouring the development of new strains of disease causing microbes as well as changes in living and eating lifestyles of individuals. For example, more and more people are becoming obese due to their eating habits and sedentary lifestyle, leading to increased non-communicable diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, cancer and sexual dysfunction (Moshi, 2006; Okigbo and Mmeka, 2006; Posadzki *et al.*, 2013). Conventional ways of combating health problems are often constrained such that some people opt for