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## Homeopathy in the treatment of cancer patients: A review

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### Abstract

**Background:** Very few cancer patients seek homeopathy as a complementary therapy. Homeopathy is highly controversial as there is no plausible mode of action for these highly diluted remedies. The CAM prevalence among cancer patients was estimated at around 60% to 80%. CAM therapies includes meditation, acupuncture, homeopathy, yoga, and diet into their care Cancer patients should be made aware that homeopathy can be taken as an alternative complimentary medical procedure for improving quality of life. Thus, the aim of this review is to summarize the efficacy of homeopathic remedies used as a only or additional therapy in cancer care.

**Keywords:** Alternative medicine, cancer; complementary treatment, homeopathy

### Introduction

Many cancer patients use complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) treatments. Homeopathy is one of the most popular CAM modalities for cancer patients in seven out of 14 European countries <sup>[1]</sup> Homeopathy has traditionally been very popular in India and South America too, and is increasingly sought after also in the US <sup>[2]</sup>

According to the 2012 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) performed in the U.S. 5 million adults and 1 million children used homeopathic products per year. When this result is compared to the results of the 2002 and 2007 surveys, it is observed that the figure increased with each passing year <sup>[3, 4]</sup> In another national survey published in 2016 reported that 2.1% of adults in the U.S. used homeopathic products in the previous year <sup>[5]</sup> Homeopathy is currently one of the 10 alternative medical procedures most commonly used by cancer patients <sup>[6]</sup>

Patients with cancer commonly use complementary and integrative medicine (CIM) to improve their quality of life, to gain a sense of control, and to participate actively in their care. Patients often search for additional options to manage the chronic side effects of treatments, for ways to reduce the risk of recurrence or secondary cancers, and sometimes for additional treatments for comorbid conditions exacerbated by their illness. In order to achieve these goals, some patients choose to incorporate CIM therapies such as meditation, acupuncture, homeopathy, yoga, and diet into their care <sup>[7-9]</sup>

### Homeopathy in treatment of cancer

Luo Q *et al.* conducted a cross-sectional study to define complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) use by cancer patients and investigate factors that might influence changes in CAM use in relation to cancer diagnoses. Results of this study showed that 89% percent reported lifetime CAM use, 85% reported CAM use during or after initial cancer treatment, with category-specific use as follows: mind-body medicine 39%, dietary supplements 73%, body-based therapies 30%, and energy medicine 49%. During treatment CAM use decreased for all categories except energy medicine. After treatment CAM use returned to pretreatment levels for most CAMs except chiropractic <sup>[10]</sup> Längler A *et al.* conducted a comparing responses of homeopathy users (HUs) and users of other forms of CAM (NHUs) in pediatric oncology (PO) in Germany. Comparison between HUs and NHUs with regard to the reasons for using CAM showed that the categories "for physical stabilization" (77.7% versus 63.2%), "to enhance the immune system" (72.3% versus 61.2%), "to improve the tolerability of the conventional treatment" (58.4% versus 39.3%), and "for detoxification" (42.2% versus 19.9%) were named noticeably more often by Hus <sup>[11]</sup>

Yde c *et al.* conducted a study to learn about the reasons for, and experiences with, treatment provided by homeopaths among Danish patients with cancer.

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The cancer patients in that study sought homeopathy to address their hopes and concerns and to help them face obstacles and find support. They were actively taking responsibility for their own health and valued the whole person approach used by their homeopaths. Participants reported improved well-being both at the physical and mental levels. Such knowledge could potentially be helpful to improve healthcare practitioners' communication with patients, and thereby patients' overall care<sup>[12]</sup>

Rostock M *et al.* conducted a prospective observational study with cancer patients in two differently treated cohorts: one cohort with patients under complementary homeopathic treatment and one cohort with conventionally treated cancer patients. This study observed an improvement of quality of life as well as a tendency of fatigue symptoms to decrease in cancer patients under complementary homeopathic treatment<sup>[13]</sup>

### Conclusion

We found that the beginning of homeopathy treatment in cancer patients is likely to occur at a different time during the course of the disease compared with the start of conventional treatment. Although both the groups of patients have very high expectancies toward cure through either homeopathy or conventional treatment.

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