



The benefits of integrative and complementary practices in the quality of life of oncological patients: a literature review

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Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) approved the collaboration of integrative and/or complementary medicine and defined it as actions, approaches, beliefs and experience related to health with the aid of remedies based on plants, animals and/or minerals and various other therapies and manual, spiritual and scientific techniques to provide well-being, treat, diagnose and prevent diseases [1]. Integrative medicine is an interpellation between conventional medicine and complementary practices, in a tenacious, individual and evidence-based way, which brings together different therapeutic approaches to the body, mind and environment [2].

Integrative and Complementary Practices (PICs) are based on notions aimed at preventing and recovering from various diseases. In addition, they can also be included in palliative care for chronic diseases [3,4]. In Brazil, the National Policy on Integrative and Complementary Practices was disseminated in 2006 and has been part of the lives of patients undergoing cancer treatment since then. Data reveal that 30 to 50% of these patients use Complementary or Alternative Medicine during the recovery process [2]. Examples of these practices are aromatherapy, apitherapy, art therapy, ayurveda, bioenergetics, biodance, family constellation, color therapy, circular dance, geotherapy, hypnotherapy, laying on of hands, anthroposophical medicine/anthroposophy applied to health, meditation, music therapy, naturopathy, osteopathy, ozone therapy, chiropractic care, reflex therapy, reiki, shantala, integrative community therapy, flower therapy social thermalism/crenotherapy, yoga [4,5].

In cancer patients, PICs are used in conjunction with chemotherapy, surgical treatment and in clinical

cases with a worse prognosis, seeking benefits for patients [4]. Thus, if even mentioning such a disease sounds unpleasant, it is remarkable that the patient diagnosed with this illness suffers a lot from the whole process involved. Therefore, terminal patients subjected to palliative care are vulnerable, severe mental and spiritual stresses and commonly pain and questions about life [4]. Therefore, integrative practices act in order to alleviate anxiety, pain, improve the immune system, quality of life and controls adverse side effects of cancer patients. However, despite all the benefits mentioned, adherence to these practices in the Unified Health System (SUS) occurred gradually and slowly [6].

Therefore, this study aimed to evaluate Integrative and Complementary Practices (PICs) as an alternative method to improve the quality of life of patients undergoing cancer treatment.

Methods

This is a systematic literature review in which the search for articles was performed using keywords and eligibility criteria (inclusion criteria: articles published in a free access database from 2018 to 2021, relationship with the proposed theme and exclusion criteria not applied). Articles that answered the following scientific question were chosen: What are the benefits of integrative practices in cancer treatment?

Results and Discussion

When performing the search for articles on the PubMed, Scielo and Lilacs platforms, 27 articles were found that matched the keywords (integrative and complementary practices, cancer and quality of life). From this pre-selection, only 6 answered the scientific

question with excellence, two in English, three in Portuguese and one in Spanish. Currently, cancer is one of the leading causes of death in the world. This disease evidences a physical state and an anxiety in the face of numerous changes that the diagnosis brings, the long treatment and associated effects. This provokes a continuous search for an answer, which induces individuals and their families to look for strategies, practices and treatments different from the conventional one [1].

Therefore, Integrative and Complementary Practices (PICs) aim at physical, psychological and spiritual well-being as important factors to prolong the life expectancy of cancer patients undergoing treatment, through the development of integrated activities of an interdisciplinary nature. Intervention against cancer, in humans, can cause immeasurable restlessness. It talks about an emotional stress in which the diagnosis of the disease coerces life [7]. Thus, these individuals who face chemotherapy and radiotherapy treatment due to cancer are very mentally and physically shaken, and present characteristics of sadness, discouragement, worry, anxiety, low self-esteem, depression, pain and lack of perspective.

Therefore, for cancer patients, allopathic treatment associated with complementary helps to reduce anxiety and all other negative emotions and sensations [7], as this therapeutic resource provides greater control over their condition and optimism regarding the pathology in question [1]. In order for PIC to be correctly addressed and to present good results, it is important that health professionals are well trained in integrative oncology medicine and on skills in clarifying information, approaching and educating patients [2]. Furthermore, it is understood that the use of PICS must be associated with evidence-based practices so that iatrogenic events can be avoided, given that the patient becomes biopsychosociospiritually fragile [7].

Given the numerous advantages, the increased demand for and admission of patients using the Unified Health System (SUS) in Brazil, these practices have been gradually and slowly added to the SUS [6]. It is worth noting that the articles selected for this review had relevant impacts on the quality of life of cancer patients and few adverse effects, among them, bleeding at the application sites of acupuncture and mild hematomas were reported, but nothing serious and preventing them from being performed [8]. Because, there are countless benefits reported by participants of complementary therapies, such as: reduction of pain, edema, ulcers, reduction of skin lesions, vomiting and tingling, improvement in the quality of hair, nails or circulation and strengthening of the condition physics in general. As for mental health, there was a reduction in tiredness,

anxiety, worries, stress and tension, which led to an improvement in mood, sleep quality, disposition and a sense of well-being combined with self-esteem. In addition, the context in which the practices of auxiliary interventions to conventional treatment occur provide a greater bond between the participants, as they share their experiences, have active listening, be better understood, which leads them to feel more secure, confident and optimistic about their prognoses [1].

Conclusion

The use of these alternative therapies, despite not being recent and not very widespread, have been improved and reached patients undergoing cancer treatment. Thus, we believe that PICs are tools for promoting physical and psychological well-being, given their ability to provide a better quality of life to patients. Finally, it is concluded that further randomized controlled studies on this topic are still needed to demonstrate better results regarding the advantages of integrative and complementary practices in the quality of life of cancer patients.

Keywords: Integrative practices. Complementary practices. Cancer. Quality of life.

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Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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