

Assessment Knowledge and Attitudes of the Family Physicians Towards Homeopathy: A Cross-Sectional Research

Aile Hekimleri Arasında Homeopatinin Değerlendirme Bilgisi ve Tutumları: Kesitsel Bir Araştırma

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ABSTRACT Objective: This study aimed to evaluate the knowledge and attitudes of homeopathy among family physicians. **Material and Methods:** Family physicians in Elazığ formed the universe of this cross-sectional study. We aimed to attain the whole universe without selecting any sample. The questionnaire used in the study includes 3 stages, inquiring about sociodemographic characteristics, the attitude of homeopathy, and the homeopathy-related information. Twenty-one questions were asked for information questions. One point was received for the correct answer to each item. **Results:** The median age of the family physicians was 43.33 (33.0-49.0) years. Of these physicians, 65.6% were male, 34.4% were female; also, only 14.6% participated in any course, training, or certificate program related to homeopathy. Although 66.0 % of the study participants wanted to receive a training/course about homeopathy as an alternative treatment method, 55.3% wanted a homeopathy department to be constructed in universities. We found the knowledge of the family physicians who attended to any course/training/certificate program in homeopathy to be significantly higher than those who did not. There was a statistically significant difference between the knowledge scores and the answers given to the questions listed below: “Would you like to receive a course/training about the homeopathy method?”, “Would you like a homeopathy department to be constructed in universities?” and “Would you think homeopathy is beneficial?”. This difference resulted from the answers received as ‘yes’ and ‘undecided, in all three questions. **Conclusion:** As a result, according to our study findings, more than half of the study participants want to receive training about homeopathy as an alternative treatment method, and want a homeopathy department to be constructed in universities. We, therefore, recommend educating physicians about homeopathy and to be built up homeopathy departments in medical faculties to increase the knowledge and awareness of this issue.

ÖZET Amaç: Bu çalışmada, aile hekimlerinin homeopati hakkındaki bilgi ve tutumlarının değerlendirilmesi amaçlanmıştır. **Gereç ve Yöntemler:** Kesitsel tipte olan bu araştırmanın evrenini; Elazığ’da bulunan aile hekimleri oluşturmuştur. Örneklem seçilmeden evrenin tümüne ulaşılması hedeflenmiştir. Çalışmada kullanılan anket formu; sosyodemografik özellikleri sorgulayan, homeopati ile ilgili tutumu sorgulayan ve homeopati ile ilgili bilgileri sorgulayan 3 aşamadan oluşmaktadır. Bilgi soruları için 21 maddelik sorular sorulmuştur. Sorudan her doğru cevap için 1 puan alınabilir. **Bulgular:** Araştırma kapsamına alınan aile hekimlerinin %65,6’sı erkek, %34,4’ü kadın olup, yaş ortancası 43,33 (33,0-49,0) olarak bulunmuştur. Çalışmaya katılan hekimlerin sadece %14,6’sı homeopati ile ilgili herhangi bir kurs, eğitim veya sertifika programına katılmıştır. Katılımcıların %66,0’ı homeopati yöntemi ile ilgili kurs eğitim verilmesini isterken, %55,3’ü üniversitelerde homeopati bölümü kurulmasını istemiştir. Çalışmaya katılan aile hekimlerinden homeopati ile ilgili kurs/eğitim/sertifika programına katılanların bilgisi katılmayanlardan anlamlı derecede yüksek bulunmuştur. “Tıp eğitiminde homeopati eğitimi olmalı mı?”, “Üniversitelerde homeopati departmanı kurulmalı mı?” ve “Homeopati yöntemi yararlı mı?” sorularına verilen yanıtlar ile bilgi puanları arasında istatistiksel olarak anlamlı farklılık bulunmuştur ve bu fark üçünde de “evet” ile “kararsızım” cevapları arasından kaynaklanmaktadır. **Sonuç:** Sonuç olarak, katılımcıların yarısından fazlası, homeopati yöntemi ile ilgili eğitim verilmesini ve tıp fakültelerinde bu departmanın kurulmasını istemektedir. Hekimlere homeopati ile ilgili eğitimlerin verilmesi ve tıp fakültelerinde homeopati departmanlarının kurulması bu konudaki bilgi ve farkındalığı arttıracaktır düşünülebilir.

Keywords: Homeopathy; family physicians; knowledge; attitude

Anahtar Kelimeler: Homeopati; aile hekimleri; bilgi; tutum

In the face of today’s “modern” medicine, there are methods, having a more holistic perspective, defined as “traditional” also known as complementary-alternative medicine (CAM).¹

Alternative and complementary medicine practices are the use of other methods instead of or as a complement to conventional medical practice. Namely, complementary medicine is the use of alter-

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Peer review under responsibility of Journal of Traditional Medical Complementary Therapies.

Received: 25 Mar 2021

Received in revised form: 27 Jun 2021

Accepted: 14 Aug 2021

Available online: 19 Aug 2021

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native medicine products and techniques in addition to the treatment protocols of modern medicine. Alternative and complementary medicine concepts are different from each other, but they are often used together. CAM aims to protect the physical and mental health, ensure the reconciliation of the people with themselves, their family, and their environment, and get people to know themselves better. Besides, it is composed of unique medicine methods, which use natural substances and special solutions, and different treatment and exercise techniques. Acupuncture, apitherapy, phytotherapy, hypnosis, leech therapy, homeopathy are some of them.²

Homeopathy is Greek as a word; it consists of the combination of words such as Homeos=similar, Pathos=pain, suffering. A principle like, whereas a substance results in the occurrence of certain findings in a healthy person, it provides recovery in the patients with the same outcomes, is applied.³ Homeopathy is a therapeutic method, using preparations of substances showing effects correspond to the symptoms, clinical signs, and pathological situations in the patients when administered to healthy individuals. This method was developed by the physician, pharmacist, and chemist Samuel Hahnemann (1755-1843) and is now applied all over the world.⁴ As a result of years of research and observations, Hahnemann had been having the following opinion: While any substance can make the people sick, but it can also heal them. Anything that can cause disease symptoms in a healthy person can eliminate these symptoms in an ill person.⁵ The basis of homeopathy is to actuate our life energy and to ensure our body to cope with diseases by activating our body's instinct to survive and be healthy.⁶ Homeopathy is based on two primary principles. According to the first principle of "like cures like" a homeopathic drug that produces particular signs and symptoms in healthy individuals can help patients with these signs and symptoms. In the second principle, it has been shown that homeopathic medicines (remedies) are retained their biological activity even after diluting as many as Avogadro's number.^{4,7,8} These remedies are derived from nature and the material obtained from plants, minerals, animals, secretions, and content obtained from the healed infection itself (nozzle), diseased infection itself

(nosode), healthy glands (sarcodes) is like a source for remedies close to 4,000.⁶

Homeopathic remedies are prepared by a unique process known as potentisation. The potentisation process includes serial dilution at each step. The subsequent grinding step consists of fine grinding of the starting material with lactose, and this material is used when it is not dissolved in water or alcohol. Potency levels are defined as "x" (or d) and "c" when diluted in the ratio of 1:9 and 1:99, respectively, at each step. It is considered that without dilution (or crushing), dilution does not exhibit any therapeutic effect and must not be called potency. For example, potency 12 Centesimal Hahnemannian (CH) means that the substance is diluted 12 times at a ratio of 1:99 each time. "H" here means the method of Hahnemann. In homeopathic clinical practice, higher potentials of centesimal such as 30, 200, 1,000, 10,000 CH (1 m), 50 m, etc., are used with satisfactory results routinely.⁹

Homeopathy can be used safely in many diseases, and the homeopathic physician chooses the most suitable homeopathic medicine for the patient after taking a medical history lasting for 30 minutes to one hour. The homeopathic medicine is recommended to use by swallowing in liquid or powder form, which is mixed with water, or as tablets. Its frequency and kind of use depend on the patient and the disease. Homeopathic medicines are prepared according to the guidelines identified by Homeopathic Pharmacopoeia Convention of the United States working under the supervision of the Food and Drug Administration, and 45% of these drugs are sold as over the counter-shelf in health food stores.¹⁰ This situation is valid only for the USA and the regulations in Turkey are in line with the European Pharmacopoeia like the European Union member states. Turkey does not manufacture homeopathic medicines. The remedies available in Turkey are sourced from various countries including UK, USA, India and others. According to the Turkish Republic Regulations, homeopathy can be applied only by a physician (specialist, general practitioner, etc.) and by a dentist, with the obtainment of a certificate approved by the Ministry of Health.³ Family physicians who are primary care physicians can also receive and apply this training. In this study, it is aimed to evaluate the knowledge and attitudes of family physicians about homeopathy.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The universe of this cross-sectional study consists of the family physicians who work in Elazığ. According to the list received from Elazığ Provincial Health Directorate, 196 family physicians have been working in this province, including also the districts of Elazığ. It was aimed to attain the entire universe without selecting the sample, and a total of 157 physicians (80.1% response rate) were reached.

Elazığ province is located in the southwest of the Eastern Anatolia Region of Turkey, and the Upper Euphrates Section. Its total population was 591.098 and, the whole area measurement was 8.455 km², in 2019. In the city, whereas Fethi Sekin City Hospital provides the 2nd level of health care, Firat University Medical Faculty Hospital serves the 3rd level of health care. Primary health care is delivered in 144 family medicine units in the center and 52 in the district, which is depending on the Provincial Health Directorate. A questionnaire form was used in the present study.

Furthermore, the questionnaire prepared by the researchers by scanning the literature consisted of 3 parts. In the first part, questions quiring sociodemographic characteristics, in the second part, subjects quiring the attitude about homeopathy, in the third part, issues quiring information related to homeopathy were used. We asked 21-item questions for knowledge questions. One point could be obtained for each correct answer from the item. The points that could be achieved varied between 0-21. Before initiating the survey that is performed after the obtainment of the ethics committee and necessary permits, we informed the participants that information received would not be used outside the scientific platform. After that, we declared the required explanations about the questionnaire and questions of it. The application of the survey was made under direct observation to volunteer individuals taken into the coverage of the research. Verbal informed consent was obtained from the participants.

For the study, approval was obtained from Firat University Faculty of Medicine Ethics Committee dated 10/07/2019 and numbered 337829. The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki Principles.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

In the study, descriptive data were shown with n (%) values in categorical data, and median, interquartile range (25-75 percentile values) values in continuous data. We used the chi-square test to compare categorical data. The quantitative data were tested with the Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests for the assumption of normal distribution. Mann-Whitney U test and Kruskal-Wallis test were used in places suitable for use in comparison of non-normally distributed quantitative data. We accepted p<0.05 value for statistical significance in all analyses. The analyzes were carried out with the 22 versions of the SPSS program.

RESULTS

Of the family physicians included in the study, 65.6% were male and had a median age of 43.33 (33.0-49.0) years. The median working time of the physicians was found to be 17.0 (7.0-24.0) years. The sociodemographic characteristics of family physicians are shown in [Table 1](#).

Only 14.6% of the physicians involved in the study attended any course, training, or certificate program related to homeopathy. 66.0% of the study participants wanted to receive a course/training about the homeopathy method. The attitudes of family physicians towards homeopathy are given in [Table 2](#).

When participants were asked to define their knowledge level related to homeopathy, 15.3% identified it as “none” 51.0% as “low” 26.1% as “moderate” and 7.6% as “good”.

TABLE 1: Sociodemographic characteristics of family physicians.

Sociodemographic characteristics	n	%
Gender		
Female	54	34.4
Male	103	65.6
Marital status		
Married	129	82.2
Single	20	12.7
Divorced	8	5.1
The status on perception of economic level		
Moderate	119	75.8
High-level	38	24.2

The median of the score received by family physicians included in the study after answering homeopathy knowledge questions was found to be 11.0 (5.0-13.0).

We established the knowledge score of men among the family physicians involved in the study to be significantly higher than those of women. Besides, the participants received any course/training/certificate program about homeopathy had significantly higher knowledge than those who did not receive it.

When knowledge score was associated with defining the study participants' own level of knowledge, we found a statistically significant difference between all groups; except between the groups saying "intermediate" and "good" and between the groups saying "no" and "little". There was also a statistically significant difference between the groups in association with the knowledge scores and the answers given to the following questions: "Should there be homeopathy training in medical education?", "Should the homeopathy department be constructed in universities?" and "Is homeopathy beneficial?". However, this difference is originated between the groups of "yes" and "undecided" in the three questions mentioned above. We detected another significant association of the knowledge scores with the following issues between the groups: "Should homeopathy drugs be available in pharmacies?". This difference has arisen between the answer "yes" and "undecided" and the answer "yes" and "no". A statistically significant difference was determined when groups were compared in terms of knowledge scores and explanations given to the questions listed below. "Would

you recommend the homeopathy method to your patients?", "Would you use homeopathy medicine by yourself?" and "Would you like to get a homeopathy certificate?". This difference has arisen between the groups of "yes" and "undecided" and "no" and "undecided" (Table 3).

DISCUSSION

CAM is one of the areas that has recently got interested in and developed in our country. Therefore, it has not been widespread to give courses and training related to CAM methods. In this study, 14.6% of family physicians attended any course/training/certificate program about homeopathy. In Lamarine et al.'s study performed in the USA, it was determined that 6.0% of students received CAM training.¹¹ In other studies conducted in the literature, the rate of receiving course/training related to CAM varies between 1.2-6.5%.^{5,12,13} In our study, it is seen that the rate of receiving education is higher than the literature. But this may be related to the question asked to the participants. Because the participants may have answered the question by considering the basic education received while answering the question. However, the training given for the certificate is a long-term training that requires effort and dedication. This training is different from the training given in the medical faculty or specialization program.

Of the family physicians participating in the study, 66.0% wanted to take courses/training related to homeopathy. In a survey conducted by Mildren et al. in California, 81% of physicians and another study per-

TABLE 2: The answers given by family physicians to attitude questions.*

	Yes n (%)	No n (%)	Undecided n (%)
Would you like to receive a course/training about the homeopathy method?	99 (66.0)	15 (10.0)	36 (24.0)
Should scientific training about homeopathy be given during medical education?	102 (67.1)	16 (10.5)	34 (22.4)
Would you like a homeopathy department to be constructed in universities?	84 (55.3)	13 (8.6)	55 (36.2)
Would you recommend the homeopathy method to your patients?	58 (38.2)	16 (10.5)	78 (51.3)
Would you think homeopathy is beneficial?	69 (45.4)	6 (3.9)	77 (50.7)
Would you use homeopathy medicine for yourself?	39 (25.8)	52 (34.4)	60 (39.7)
Would you like to get a homeopathy certificate?	72 (47.4)	29 (19.1)	51 (33.6)

*Those who did not answer were excluded.

TABLE 3: Knowledge levels of family physicians according to gender and homeopathy attitudes.

		Median	IQR	p value
Gender*	Female	9.0	3.0-12.0	0.009
	Male	11.0	7.0-14.0	
Defining the study participants' own level of knowledge**	No	8.50 ^{a,d}	0.0-13.0	0.004
	Little	9.50 ^{b,d}	2.5-13.0	
	Intermediate	11.0 ^{a,b,c}	9.0-13.0	
	Good	14.0 ^{a,d}	10.5-16.0	
The status of participation in course, training or certificate program**	Yes	14.0	10.0-17.0	<0.001
	No	10.5	3.0-13.0	
Should there be homeopathy training in medical education?***	Yes	11.0 ^a	8.0-14.0	0.007
	No	5.0	0.5-13.0	
	Undecided	8.5 ^a	0.0-12.0	
Should the homeopathy department be constructed in universities?***	Yes	11.5 ^a	9.0-14.0	<0.001
	No	11.0	7.0-13.0	
	Undecided	7.0 ^a	0.0-12.0	
Should homeopathy products be available in pharmacies?***	Yes	13.0 ^{a,b}	10.0-15.0	<0.001
	No	11.0 ^a	9.0-12.0	
	Undecided	6.0 ^b	0.0-12.0	
Would you recommend the homeopathy method to your patients?***	Yes	12.0 ^a	10.0-14.0	<0.001
	No	12.5 ^b	6.5-13.5	
	Undecided	8.0 ^{a,b}	0.0-12.0	
Is homeopathy beneficial?***	Yes	12.0 ^a	9.0-13.0	<0.001
	No	12.0	9.0-15.0	
	Undecided	7.0 ^a	0.0-12.0	
Would you use homeopathy medicine by yourself?***	Yes	12.0 ^a	9.0-14.0	0.003
	No	11.0 ^b	6.0-13.0	
	Undecided	9.0 ^{a,b}	0.0-12.0	
Would you like to get a certificate?***	Yes	12.0 ^a	9.0-14.0	<0.001
	No	10.0 ^b	4.0-13.0	
	Undecided	8.0 ^{a,b}	0.0-11.0	

* Mann-Whitney U test; **Kruskal-Wallis test; a,b,c,dThe group that the differences are originated from; IQR: Interquartile range.

formed by Sikand et al. with pediatric specialists, 54.1% of physicians stated that they had been willing to learn about CAM.^{14,15} Also, in the study of Winslow et al., 60% of physicians wanted to receive more training about CAM.¹⁶ As a result of the analysis of a total of 21 studies conducted about the attitudes of health-care professionals towards CAM by Sewitch et al. in the USA and Canada, it was determined that 81% of primary care physicians had been willing to receive more training on CAM.¹⁷ In the present study, too, for being more knowledgeable about CAM, the rate of requesting training by family physicians was found in the range of 60-81%. Our study results are remarkably similar to the literature data.

Of family physicians, 67.1% think that the homeopathy method should be included in the medical

education curriculum in the present survey. Besides, 55.3% of the participants stated that they wanted the homeopathy department to be constructed in universities. According to the study performed by Teixeira et al., 70.6% of the participants noted that homeopathy should be in the curriculum of the lesson.¹⁸ In the study of Tekçi, 71.0% of the physicians wanted the CAM department to be established in universities.⁵ Although the results of our study seem to be similar to literature, the rate of requesting homeopathy training in the curriculum was found to be lower than the rate of demanding the homeopathy department to be constructed in the universities. This status may suggest that family physicians are sensitive to homeopathy training, but are still undecided at the stage of institutionalization of this training.

Of the family physicians participating in the present study, 45.4% consider that homeopathy is beneficial. At the same time, 38.2% stated that they would recommend the homeopathy method to their patients, and 25.8% said that they could use homeopathy medicine. In a study by Ünlüer, 44.4% of the participants also believe that CAM is beneficial.¹⁹ In the study of Özçakır et al., 51.4% of physicians also think that CAM practices are effective; 0.6% feel that they are undecided in this issue.²⁰ Even though family physicians have deficiencies regarding the benefits of homeopathy, the attitude of recommending homeopathy to their patients and using homeopathy themselves is high among family physicians. This situation can be explained by having a lack of family physicians to put their attitudes about the usefulness of homeopathy into practice. In this study, homeopathy knowledge levels of those who said that there should be homeopathy in medical education, those who think that homeopathy department should be constructed in universities, and those who believe that homeopathy products should be available in pharmacies were found high.

CONCLUSION

As a result, although the homeopathy method is less used and less known among the CAM techniques in Turkey, it has been observed that family physicians

have positive attitudes towards homeopathy, and they want to receive education on this issue. Organizing and promoting the certificate program and training, especially for family physicians, will increase the usability of the homeopathy method.

Source of Finance

During this study, no financial or spiritual support was received neither from any pharmaceutical company that has a direct connection with the research subject, nor from a company that provides or produces medical instruments and materials which may negatively affect the evaluation process of this study.

Conflict of Interest

No conflicts of interest between the authors and / or family members of the scientific and medical committee members or members of the potential conflicts of interest, counseling, expertise, working conditions, share holding and similar situations in any firm.

Authorship Contributions

Idea/Concept: Nafiye Fulya İlhan, Osman Kurt, A. Ferdane Oğuzöncül; **Design:** Nafiye Fulya İlhan, Osman Kurt, A. Ferdane Oğuzöncül; **Control/Supervision:** Nafiye Fulya İlhan, Osman Kurt, A. Ferdane Oğuzöncül; **Data Collection and/or Processing:** Osman Kurt, A. Ferdane Oğuzöncül; **Analysis and/or Interpretation:** Nafiye Fulya İlhan, Osman Kurt, A. Ferdane Oğuzöncül; **Literature Review:** Nafiye Fulya İlhan, Osman Kurt; **Writing the Article:** Nafiye Fulya İlhan, Osman Kurt, A. Ferdane Oğuzöncül; **Critical Review:** Nafiye Fulya İlhan, Osman Kurt, A. Ferdane Oğuzöncül.

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