



The Health Belief Model's Impacts on the Use of Complementary and Alternative Medicine by Parents or Guardians of Children with Cancer

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Dear Editor-in-Chief

The Health Belief Model (HBM) is applied by focusing on the attitudes, beliefs, and practices of individuals. This model suggests that a person will take a health-related action such as use of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) if that person feels that a negative related condition or side-effects can be avoided, or has a positive expectation of taking a recommended action, or perceives that the benefits of partaking in a new behaviour or new action will reduce the chances of developing a medical condition or illness and its related symptoms (1).

Perception and attitude might determine how people will practice and behave in certain conditions. The HBM is widely used in health promotion and health education situations. It is found to predict various health behaviours such as taking a prognostic test, choosing to use a type of treatment or medicine, or taking a preventive action regarding any illness (1, 2).

The HBM applies well to the reasons why parents of children with cancer choose to use CAM. When parents discover that their child is susceptible to a particular illness they may seek to use CAM as a preventive method before symptoms of the illness occur (an example of perceived susceptibility). When a person perceives their diagnosis to be serious they may consider using CAM in conjunction with the treatment they are receiving from a conventional practitioner, as a way of taking advantage of all possible treatments (an example of perceived benefits), either by their own personal experience with CAM or by learning the benefits through another avenue, such as family, friends, and religious beliefs (an example of cues of action). However, if someone does not believe in CAM treatment (an example of perceived barriers), they may see this as a barrier and choose to use only conventional medicine (1- 4). The parents' attitude towards CAM use can be explained by the HBM, as the parents take action

and use treatment to prevent or minimise the harmful side-effects of cancer symptoms or treatment side-effects. In general, parents try to use CAM like honey, or eating or drinking herbs because they perceive the benefits of these products and their self-efficacy in reducing the side-effects of conventional treatment. Therefore, parents try to use CAM for their school-age children in combination with conventional medicine. This will occur in order to reach the maximum benefit and fight the cancer, for example, by offering honey with black seeds during the chemotherapy cycle. However, many cues of action are used by parents, like knowledge and experience (5). There are religious beliefs regarding some CAM treatments mentioned in the Holy Qur'an, such as "From the Honey there is a cure for people", or, as the Prophet Mohammed said about the black seeds, "the black seed can heal every disease, except death."(6).

Among non-users fears about the side-effects and interaction of CAM with conventional medicine may force the parents to depend only on the conventional medicine, which is a perceived barrier of using CAM. However, when parents have decided to choose to use any type of CAM and they believe in its healing power, this is self-efficacy (3, 7- 9).

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