

Use of traditional folk medicine among cancer patients in Northern Norway

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Background

Traditional folk medicine (TFM) in the north of Norway consists of several practices like religious healing, cupping, herbal medicine, blood stemming and bloodletting. These practices have a longstanding tradition throughout Northern Norway, specifically in areas with a large Sàmi/Kven population. TFM has played a vital part in managing health and illness long before conventional medicine was made available in these communities and are still sought after, often for conditions like anxiety and cancer. The aim of this study is to determine the level of TFM use within one year in an adult population with a previous cancer diagnosis, and to compare use in 1995 and 2015.

Methods

The Tromsø Study series (I-VII) are prospective studies in the municipality of Tromsø, Northern Norway. The design includes repeated population health surveys to which total birth cohorts and random samples are invited. This preliminary results are based on data from the Tromsø IV study conducted in 1995 where 27158 men and women aged 25-97 participated.

Preliminary Results

In 1995, a total of 3.3% of the cancer patients reported to have used TFM within the last year. Utilization was similar between men (3.4%) and women (3.3%). More men with cancer used TFM than men without cancer (3.9% vs. 2%). The use in women with cancer did not differ from women without cancer (3.5% vs. 3.7%). The highest number of users was found in the oldest age group where 5.7% of the cancer patients, 5.5% among men and 6% women, reported to have used TFM. The results from the 2015 study are not yet available.

Conclusion

Recent qualitative data suggest that TFM is still actively used in North Norway. The rather low use in this study can be explained by the fact that TFM are traditionally dealt with in silence in the north of Norway, both with regard to having traditional healing skills and to receiving traditional healing.

