COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE IN IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME: A SURVEY AMONGST ITALIAN GASTROENTEROLOGISTS

Edith Lahner, Sara Emerenziani, Michele Cicala, Paolo Arullani, Bruno Annibale.

Department of Digestive and Liver Disease, University Sapienza, Sant’Andrea Hospital, Rome; Department of Gastroenterology, University Campus Bio Medico, Rome; Italian Foundation “Aldo Torsoli” for Digestive, Liver and Pancreatic Diseases, Rome, Italy.

Objective: Patients with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) increasingly use complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). So far, gastroenterologists’ view towards CAM is not known. This study aimed to investigate the attitude towards use of CAM in IBS amongst Italian gastroenterologists.

Methods: e-mail survey of randomly selected academic and non-academic Italian gastroenterologists by a 12 items-questionnaire regarding demographics, knowledge about CAM and CAM use by IBS patients.

Results: 96/105 (65.6% male, age 48 years) gastroenterologists completed the questionnaire. Knowledge about CAM was rated as none, low, medium or high by 12.5%, 61.5%, 21.9% and 4.2%, no difference was found between academic and non-academic gastroenterologists. Overall, 67% had a positive attitude towards CAM, which was suggested to patients with gastrointestinal disorders by 30.2%. The percentage of IBS patients using CAM was estimated as over 50% by 19.8% and as less than 10% by 43.7% of gastroenterologists. Homeopathy, herbal medicine and nutrition-based therapies were held as the most frequently used CAM treatments in IBS. According to 14.6% and 13.5% of gastroenterologists, CAM was felt to be often or sometimes helpful to their patients. CAM was suggested as therapy for IBS by 20.8% of gastroenterologists.

Conclusions: 26% of Italian gastroenterologists feel confident with CAM irrespective of age, gender or academic affiliation and about 30% consider CAM a therapeutic option for patients with IBS and other gastrointestinal disorders. High quality studies on CAM’s effectiveness are needed to produce reliable evidence about usefulness of these therapeutic tools in IBS.