UTILIZATION OF FOLK MEDICINE IN AFRICAN AMERICANS: THE JACKSON HEART STUDY

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Abstract: According to an Academy of Sciences report, approximately 15 million adults are taking herbal medicine or high doses of vitamins in conjunction with prescription medication. Over 60% of the U.S. population uses at least one type of Complementary and Alternative Medicines (CAM) therapy. Reasons reported for CAM uses are: therapies are perceived to be healthier, desire to take control of health, and to cure or relieve diseases. In this study, the subtype of CAM referred to as folk medicine (FM) was investigated using the Jackson Heart Study (JHS) baseline examination (September 2000 – March 2004) data. The use of herbal medicines is much higher in Hispanics than in African Americans. Folk medicine as defined in the Jackson Heart Study is the use of the least one of the following home remedies: vinegar, epsom salt, lemon/lemon juice, garlic teas, roots of herbs used by participants in the last two weeks of their baseline clinic visit for medical reasons only. The primary objectives of this study were to determine: the prevalence folk medicine of AA, socio-demographic and clinical correlates, and the major health-related reasons for use of folk medicine. Descriptive statistics were performed to describe the characteristics of the study sample stratified by folk medicine use and to obtain crude prevalence rate of folk medicine use in the JHS cohort. Simple and multiple logistic regression models were performed. The prevalence of folk medicine use in the JHS cohort at the time of the baseline examination was 58.3% with gender-differences (women: 60.2% vs. men: 55.2%; p=0.0004). Women (OR=1.23; 95% CI: 1.10, 1.38), non-current smokers (OR=1.28; 95% CI: 1.10, 1.51), persons with hypertension (OR= 1.41; 95% CI: 1.26, 1.58) and type 2 diabetes (OR=1.22; 95% CI: 1.06, 1.79) were more likely to use FM compared to their counterparts. Also, persons on anti-hypertensive medication were more likely to use FM (OR=1.49; 95% CI: 1.23, 1.79). Age (OR=1.14; 95% CI: 1.10, 1.20) and diastolic blood pressure were positively associated with FM use. Overweight (OR=1.27; 95% CI: 1.07, 1.51) and obese (OR=1.21; 95% CI: 1.21, 1.68) persons were more likely to be FM users. The prevalence of FM in AA represented by JHS cohort was higher than previously noted in the literature. Utility of FM was higher in women than men. There was also a significant association between the use of FM and cardiovascular risk factors such as hypertension and diabetes. Further investigation is needed regarding the combined use of FM and pharmacological therapy for the treatment/management of hypertension and diabetes.

Key Words: Folk Medicine, Alternative Medicine, Jackson Heart Study, African Americans, Utilization, Prevalence

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