Aim: Alternative medicine (AM) usage is frequent among cancer patients. It can be used to decrease symptoms related to disease, chemotherapy (CT) side effects or as a real alternative to specific oncologic treatments. It is a commercial area and cancer patients know few about them. We aimed to investigate AM usage and knowledge levels of chemotherapy receiving cancer patients in our unit.

Methods: Questionaires about AM usage and knowledge levels of the patients, were fulfilled face to face by a physician with solid tumor patients taking chemotherapy.

Results: A total of 289 patients were included. Median age was 58 (min –max: 21 - 89). Sixtytwo of 289 patients (22%) received AM. Fiftytwo patients (18%) thought AM are beneficial and 237 of them (82%) thougt they were harmful. Sixtyone of them (98%) received AM orally. Majority of them were herbal substances. Twenty eight of the patients (45%) used AM due to belief of natural products strengthen their body, 16 of them (26%) used AM due to their relatives' insistence, 8 patients (13%) used AM with thought of their CT is not benefitting and 10 patients (16%) received AM as a supportive treatment. All patients were taking AM daily. Thirtyfive patients (36.5%) received AM before or after and 37 (60%) received concomitant with chemotherapy. Thirtytwo patients (52%) did not inform their clinicians while using AM. Twentyone patients (34%) had no opinion about effects and 45 (73%)had no opinion about side effects of the AM they are using. Thirty patients did not know the contents of the AM they are using. Twentynine of the patients (47%) using AM told they can use the same treatments again.

Conclusions: The AM were frequently recommended by close friends, relatives or doctors. Half of the patients did not inform their clinicians about AM they used. They used oral AM and bought AM from herbalists or doctors. Chemical or biologic substances taken concomitant with chemotherapy might cause drug-chemical or biologic compound interactions in cancer patients. Nevertheless these interactions might cause severe morbidity and sometimes fatality. Knowledge levels of cancer patients on AM is very low. Majority of cancer patients in our country have poor income and low education level. There is no regulatory measures in our country on AM. Uncontrolled usage of AM may harm cancer patients' health and they might be overdriven by the AM sellers.

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