

# **Investigating the status of health literacy and the extent and method of using complementary and alternative medicine in patients with gastrointestinal cancers who referred to the Imam Khomeini Medical Education Center in 1401**

## **Abstract**

**Background:** Cancer is one of the most important health issues in Iran. Due to the fact that Iranians have a positive attitude towards complementary medicine, the demand for this type of treatment is increasing. However, those undergoing this treatment often have limited knowledge about it. This study was conducted with the aim of determining the status of health literacy and the extent and manner of using complementary and alternative medicine in patients with gastrointestinal cancers referred to the Imam Khomeini Medical Education Center in 1401.

## **Aim:**

**Materials and Methods:** This cross-sectional study was conducted on 133 patients with gastrointestinal cancer who referred to specialized clinics of Imam Khomeini Hospital in Ardabil for follow-up and treatment, according to the entry and exit criteria. These patients were asked to answer the questions related to the demographic information questionnaire and the use of complementary medicine and the health literacy questionnaire related to complementary and alternative medicine Shreffler-grant. Finally, the data was entered into SPSS software and statistical analysis was performed on them.

**Results:** Among the 133 patients participating in this study, 94.7% of the patients participating in this study used complementary medicine. The most commonly used complementary medicine in these patients were spiritual treatments such as prayer (94.0%), medicinal plants (69.2%), going to

pilgrimage sites (62.4%) and hydrotherapy (28.6%). In this study, most of the patients had moderate health literacy. The average health literacy in the examined patients was 59. In this study, it was seen that health literacy was higher in men ( $P < 0.001$ ) and it was higher in patients with self-employed jobs, farmers, retirees, and employees than other jobs ( $P < 0.001$ ), but there was a significant difference according to the level of education and type of cancer. There was no statistical significance ( $P > 0.05$ ). With increasing age and duration of illness, health literacy in patients increased, but this increase was not statistically significant ( $P > 0.05$ ). On the other hand, there was no statistically significant difference in the amount of use of traditional medicine according to the gender of the patients, their level of education, the amount of income of the patients, their occupation, age, duration of illness and health literacy ( $P > 0.05$ ).

**Conclusion:** The results of this study show that the use of complementary medicine is very popular among Iranian cancer patients and most of these patients benefit from complementary medicine (in the form of prayer and spiritual healing or the use of medicinal plants). It also seems that Iranian cancer patients have adequate health literacy related to complementary and alternative medicine.

**Key words:** Health literacy, complementary medicine, alternative medicine, traditional medicine, use of complementary medicine, cancer, digestive system.