

Almost Half of U.S. Veterans Use CAM

Editorial Staff

A study recently published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*¹ found that 49.6 percent of U.S. military veterans use some form of CAM (complementary or alternative medicine). These findings are, the researchers noted, "consistent with findings in civilian populations in the United States."

The researchers conducted telephone surveys with 508 randomly selected veterans residing in southern Arizona. If the participants asked what CAM was, they were told it was therapy "such as acupuncture, aromatherapy, chiropractic, herbal remedies, or homeopathy."

Veterans reported that their primary reasons for using CAM were for complaints of "back pain (56 percent), musculoskeletal pain (22 percent), and stress or psychological problems (20 percent)." The first two complaints are of course consistent with what most DCs see in their every day practices. Perhaps even more encouraging is the fact that "(t)here were no significant differences for sex, mean +/- SD age of CAM users (61.9 +/- 13.9 years) and nonusers (62.7 +/- 13.6 years), or age by group (younger than 30, 31-49, 50-69, and 70 years and older)." In the past, the use of CAM was higher among women and younger adults, but it is apparently becoming more consistent among all age and gender groups.

There were also "no significant differences, however, by branch of military service (U.S. Air Force; Army; Marines; Navy; Coast Guard; or National Guard)."

The study found that "(v)eterans using CAM were also more likely to have requested help in making decisions about CAM use (47.2 percent) compared with non-CAM users (3.1 percent) ($P < .001$)." This is significant in that prospective veteran chiropractic patients will likely be asking questions about the value of chiropractic care in the VA health system. Whom they ask and how much information is readily available may well determine their decisions regarding chiropractic.

Other particulars of interest from the study:

"Interestingly, friends, family, newspaper articles, and medical references were cited as the leading resources for CAM information.

"The nearly 50-percent prevalence rate for CAM use in our study of military veterans is notable compared with the 28-percent prevalence rate for CAM use among active duty personnel, retired veterans, and their dependents receiving care at an army family practice clinic. The higher self-reported rate of CAM use in our study is also noteworthy in that the sample comprises older military veterans (mean age, 62 years), who traditionally are thought of as very conservative.

"Interestingly, in a qualitative focus group study of military veterans and their significant others, drug adverse effects, prescription drug monitoring, and distrust of the pharmaceutical industry were leading reasons for active duty and retired veterans, and their dependents to turn to CAM.

"Based on the results of the logistic regression, education appears to play a greater role than income in CAM-using veterans' choice of health care. Notably, education beyond high school has

been the most consistent finding associated with CAM use. Indeed, consistent with our sample of military veterans, education was the leading sociodemographic predictor of CAM use in a national survey."

As chiropractic is the only form of "CAM" scheduled to be implemented by the VA health system, doctors of chiropractic may be the only source of "acupuncture, aromatherapy, chiropractic, herbal remedies, or homeopathy" available to the 49.6 percent of veterans seeking these forms of care. This study - published in a medical research journal, no less - should send some very clear messages to those implementing the chiropractic benefit within the VA health system:

- Today's veterans are seeking a broad base of alternative care that doctors of chiropractic are particularly qualified to deliver.
- Chiropractic is directly responsive to the two primary complaints among veterans who seek CAM.
- While not all doctors of chiropractic practice all facets of what is considered CAM, allowing DCs the same practice rights that they enjoy in the civilian health care system will provide most, if not all, of the health benefits currently sought by veterans.
- People with higher educations choose CAM. Chiropractic's primary access inclusion in the VA health system is the choice knowledgeable veterans would make if given the opportunity.

Reference

1. Baldwin CM, Lang K, Kroesen K, Brooks AJ, Bell IR. A profile of military veterans in the Southwestern United States who use complementary and alternative medicine. *Arch Intern Med* 2002;162:1697-1704.

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