

Patient satisfaction and side effects in primary care: an observational study comparing homeopathy and conventional medicine.

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Abstract

BACKGROUND:

This study is part of a nationwide evaluation of complementary medicine in Switzerland (Programme Evaluation of Complementary Medicine PEK) and was funded by the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health. The main objective of this study is to investigate patient satisfaction and perception of side effects in homeopathy compared with conventional care in a primary care setting.

METHODS:

We examined data from two cross-sectional studies conducted in 2002-2003. The first study was a physician questionnaire assessing structural characteristics of practices. The second study was conducted on four given days during a 12-month period in 2002/2003 using a physician and patient questionnaire at consultation and a patient questionnaire mailed to the patient one month later (including Europep questionnaire). The participating physicians were all trained and licensed in conventional medicine. An additional qualification was required for medical doctors providing homeopathy (membership in the Swiss association of homeopathic physicians SVHA).

RESULTS:

A total of 6778 adult patients received the questionnaire and 3126 responded (46.1%). Statistically significant differences were found with respect to health status (higher percentage of chronic and severe conditions in the homeopathic group), perception of side effects (higher percentage of reported side effects in the conventional group) and patient satisfaction (higher percentage of satisfied patients in the homeopathic group).

CONCLUSION:

Overall patient satisfaction was significantly higher in homeopathic than in conventional care. Homeopathic treatments were perceived as a low-risk therapy with two to three times fewer side effects than conventional care.