

The use of alternative or complementary medicine for children with atopic dermatitis

O uso da medicina alternativa ou complementar em crianças com dermatite atópica

Nelson dos Reis Aguiar Júnior *¹

Izelda Maria Carvalho Costa²

Abstract: Complementary or Alternative Medicine is defined as a form of therapy that has no scientific basis or proven effectiveness. The aim of this study was to investigate the prevalence of the use of such therapies for pediatric patients with atopic dermatitis at the University Hospital of Brasília, in the period between March 2007 and December 2008. A total number of 54 patients (63.5%) used some kind of alternative resource and phytotherapy and homeopathy were the most used ones.

Keywords: Complementary therapies; Dermatitis, atopic; Pruritus

Resumo: Medicina alternativa ou complementar é definida como forma de terapia que não possui bases científicas ou eficácia comprovadas. O objetivo deste estudo foi investigar a prevalência do uso dessas terapias por pacientes pediátricos com dermatite atópica no Hospital Universitário de Brasília, no período de março de 2007 a dezembro de 2008. Um total de 54 pacientes (63,5%) utilizou algum tipo de recurso alternativo, fitoterapia e homeopatia foram os recursos alternativos mais utilizados.

Palavras-chave: Dermatite atópica; Prurido; Terapias complementares

Alternative or Complementary Medicine (ACM) has been defined as diagnosis, treatment and/or prevention which complements conventional medicine as it contributes, as a whole, to satisfy the demands not found in the orthodox medicine or because it diversifies the conceptual framework of medicine and includes new forms of therapy that do not have scientific bases or efficacy proven by scientific methods.¹

Atopic dermatitis (AD) in childhood is a common disease and its incidence has been increasing.² The use of ACM has been increasing around the world, including for the treatment of AD and there are

few clinical trials in the area. Homeopathy, phytotherapy, acupuncture, aromatherapy, chromotherapy, topical application of animal products, meditation practices, relaxation techniques, massages as therapy and nutritional diets constitute ACM resources used for treating atopic eczema.

The objective of this study was to evaluate the prevalence of the use of ACM in children suffering from AD, to assess the factors that can influence the decision of using unconventional therapies in clinical practice, to identify the nature of the alternative resources used, to verify if the length of time of the

Received on 14.01.2010.

Approved by the Advisory Board and accepted for publication on 23.01.10.

* Study conducted at the Pediatric Dermatology Outpatient Clinic, Teaching Hospital, University of Brasília, Brasília, Brazil.

Conflict of interest: None / *Conflito de interesse: Nenhum*

Financial funding: None / *Suporte financeiro: Nenhum*

¹ Master of Health Sciences - Undergoing doctorate in Pharmaceutical Sciences – Brasília (DF), Brazil. (** In memoriam*)

² Tutor from the post graduation course in Health Sciences from UnB, coordinator at the ambulatory of Dermatopediatrics from the University of Brasília (UnB) – Brasília (DF), Brazil.

disease is associated with greater probability of using alternative resources and still to assess the cost factor of treatment with ACM resources.

The studied population consisted of 85 children suffering from AD, aged from 0 to 18 years, treated in the pediatric dermatology service of the University Hospital from the University of Brasília. The instrument used was a questionnaire that parents of patients or their guardians answered and data was collected from patients' records. Statistical analysis of data was performed by the system SPSS, *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences*, version 15.0. To test the association among variables it was used the Spearman correlation coefficient and the test χ^2 (chi-square). It was considered relevant a ratio of $p < 0,05$.

A total of 45 patients (63,5%) admitted they were using or that they had used ACM in the treatment of AD and 29,4% patients affirmed to use ACM due to indication of friends and/or relatives, homeop-

athy and phytotherapy or herbal medicine were the features of ACM more used. In our study, the long duration of the disease was associated to an increased probability of using ACM ($p < 0,05$). The cost of the treatment, in this research, did not interfere in the decision of using CAM ($p > 0,05$).

In the population studied it was high the prevalence of the use of ACM. This use occurred most often due to indication of relatives and friends, and also because the expected results from orthodox medicine were not obtained. The main alternative resource used was phytotherapy, in the forms of baths and teas. Most of these resources have been ineffective and pruritus worsened in 80% of ACM users ($< 0,05$).^{3,4} It was recommended to doctors and health professionals to routinely question patients about the use of ACM as drug interactions and worsening of skin condition may occur.⁵ □

REFERENCES

1. Hughes R, Ward D, Tobin AM, Keegan K, Kirby B. The use of alternative medicine in pediatric patients with atopic dermatitis. *Pediatr Dermatol.* 2007;24:118-20.
2. Sehra S, Barbé-Tuana FM, Holbreich M, Mousdicas N, Kaplan MH, Travers JB. Clinical correlations of recent developments in the pathogenesis of atopic dermatitis. *An Bras Dermatol.* 2008;83:57-73.
3. WITT CM, Lüdtke R, BAUR R, WILLICH SN. Homeopathic medical practice: long term results of a cohort study with 3981 patients. *BMC Public Health.* 2005;3:5:115.
4. JEAN D, Cyr C. Use of complementary and alternative medicine in a general pediatric clinic. *Pediatrics.* 2007;120:138-141.
5. Smith N, Shin DB, Brauer JA, Mao J, Gelfand JM. Use of complementary and alternative medicine among adults with skin disease: Results from a national survey. *J Am Acad Dermatol.* 2009; 60: 419-425.

MAILING ADDRESS / ENDEREÇO PARA CORRESPONDÊNCIA:

Izelda Maria Carvalho Costa
 SHIS QI 17 conjunto 08 casa 02
 71645 080 Lago Sul Brasília-DF, Brazil
 Phone.: 61 3346 1614
 e-mail: izelda@unb.br

How to cite this article/*Como citar este artigo*: Aguiar Jr NR, Costa IMC. The use of alternative or complementary medicine for children with atopic dermatitis. *An Bras Dermatol.* 2010;86(1):165-6.