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Editorial

Research – Driving forward integrated medicine

Conferences

ICCMR in Miami, USA

Integrative medicine is being driven forward by innovation on all fronts; clinical practice, methods of diagnosis, education, and in particular, research. The exchanging of ideas and provision of educational opportunities are crucial in such a rapidly developing field, with conferences being an ideal arena to facilitate this. The International Research Congress on Integrative Medicine and Health held in Miami in May provided an action packed three days, bringing together practitioners and researchers from many different countries. Diverse health care providers, universities and disciplines were represented and the conference provided a critical forum for dissemination, learning, networking and forging new collaborations. Key highlights were the advances in basic science and psychological research as well as the enormous amount of research now being carried out on the value of self-care approaches, such as tai chi, yoga and mindfulness. Presentations on pain and cancer were also prominent. Evidence is certainly increasing, but it was clear from this congress that the meaning and experience of ‘integration’ varies dramatically between countries and still needs further debate.

CAMSTRAND at the Christie NHS Foundation Trust, Manchester, UK

In UK, the one day Complementary and Alternative Medicine Strategic Direction and Development (CAMSTRAND) conference was held in June at The Christie NHS Foundation Trust in Manchester. A preconference workshop on ‘Developing a Career in Research in CAM’ was facilitated by Dr Peter Mackereith (clinical lead for Complementary therapies at The Christie NHS Foundation Trust). Peter briefly talked about the team’s collaborations and research activities in the hospital investigating acupuncture, reflexology, aromatherapy and hypnotherapy in practice. The Christie is a major cancer centre providing chemotherapy, radiotherapy and surgery – with one of the largest complementary teams in the UK providing over 11,000 treatments to patients and carers annually. Practical advice and guidance for post-graduate students and early career researchers was provided by Dr John Hughes, Dr Karen Pilkington and Prof Nicola Robinson on how to build a successful career in

CAM research. The conference keynote was given by Dr Caroline Hoffman OAM. Originally from Melbourne, Caroline has a degree in social work from the University of Melbourne, as well as critical care nursing, has skills and experience in a variety of complementary therapies. Today, Caroline is known to many as Clinical and Research Director of The Haven, a registered charity which provides free emotional support, information and complementary therapies to those with breast cancer. There are three centres in London, Hereford, Leeds, with a fourth due to open in Wessex in 2015. Caroline was congratulated at the conference, as she was honoured in June this year with the Medal of the Order of Australia for her contribution to breast cancer support services. Her talk, entitled ‘A Research Journey from the Body to the Mind’, focussed on her doctoral work on mindfulness, and also discussed the benefits and challenges for those conducting research within the field, as well as researching in clinical practice [1,2]

Students from the universities of York, London South Bank, Westminster, Southampton, Teeside, Anglia Ruskin, Glasgow Caledonian, Warwick, Staffordshire, and Sheffield provided both oral and poster presentations throughout the day. The abstracts for all the presentations appear in this issue of the *European Journal of Integrative Medicine*, and are open access [3–14]. The award for the best oral power point presentation went to AJ Yates and best oral poster presentation went to Graeme Donald.

Delegate evaluations were very positive, in no small part due to the supportive nature of the conference, but also the opportunity to network with others who are passionate about raising the profile of research in CAM. This conference has as its focus nurturing and developing postgraduate research. These students are important in forming the next generation of researchers. The next CAMSTRAND conference will be held at London South Bank University and will be open to any MPhil/PhD student interested in presenting and wishing to obtain support and feedback on their research studies.

Issue 5

The original articles in this issue of the *EuJIM*, report a fascinating range of studies. Two papers feature the use of diagnostic methods, the first, a pulse measurement device, found some agreement between readings for both the three positions and

the nine indicators when comparing traditional Chinese pulses readings between TCM practitioners [15]. This paper is the open access, Editor's Choice for this issue. The second paper looks at whether we can diagnose from looking at the age-old question about diagnosing from the iris. The authors investigate whether what we are seeing is anatomical or the result of functional changes, and conclude that it is more to do with inherited characteristics than function [16]. Integrative medicine research is clearly questioning more of the 'traditional' and holistic diagnostic approaches by exploring their accuracy. Future research should continue to examine these important areas that inform our clinical diagnosis and practice.

A survey of cancer patients' views on acupuncture, produced some interesting but not entirely surprising results [17]. Amongst non-White participants, those with pain or with prior knowledge about acupuncture were more willing to consider acupuncture during radiotherapy. The paper highlights the need to provide information about the appropriateness of interventions such as acupuncture alongside conventional medicine to facilitate the successful integration of acupuncture into cancer care. Half of the patients in this study had no knowledge about acupuncture. More and more people are being diagnosed with cancer each year with numbers expected to double by 2030 [18]. Dispelling myths and providing useful information for decision making around complementary therapies in cancer care is a conversation which continues to be an on-going issue for those providing integrative medicine services [19]. At The Haven face-to-face engagement has been found to be necessary to fully explore patient benefits and concerns.

In this issue integrated medicine practices are considered in three articles [20–22]. Taiwanese patients' records were examined from the National Health Insurance Research Database to identify treatments received for URTI and any co-prescription of TCM treatments [21]. The study provided insight on prescribing and raises interesting issues about the potential influence of culture and gender on choices and behaviour. The second, Canadian, article looked at CAM disclosure amongst GPs and underlines the importance of the patient-CAM provider relationship for promoting client-initiated coordination of care [22]. A Korean case report proposes a potential strategy for treating severe active ulcerative colitis by combining traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and conventional drugs [23]. These three papers suggest that patients need confidence to communicate their requirements and needs within an integrative healthcare system to achieve the best care. England's National Health Service is currently making a shift in emphasis to measuring patient outcomes [24] rather than being driven by numerical targets set by Government. It is hoped that in the UK with the introduction of the Community Matrons, listening to patients, particularly those in need of ongoing long-term care in the community, will support the integrative care agenda. Leading on from this, the legitimacy of the conclusions drawn from RCTs are questioned by Milgrom who argues that it is essentially incorrect to assume that specific and non-specific effects of a complex intervention can be separated into simultaneously measurable, non-interacting sets of observations [25].

Tackling MRSA is an international problem; assay-based studies looking at essential oils and their components might help in this critical work for the global healthcare community [26]. Other important work reported here includes a study screening traditional Chinese herbs for EGFR inhibitory activity that may identify a large number of compounds which may lead to the development of new drugs to treat cancer [27]. There is great potential for basic scientific research to be the starting point for driving drug development for integrative medicine. Two other studies use animal models to investigate how plants and their extracts might help with delay of onset of Parkinson's disease symptoms [28] and their possible role in obesity [29]. Another high profile disease of our modern age is diabetes and examining the effect of plant extracts artificially included diabetes in rats is illustrated by Attanayake A.P et al. [30].

The student paper in this issue investigated advertising claims on the internet of privately owned floating centres and the purported benefits of flotation to potential customers. These claims were compared with published scientific evidence and indicated that there are discrepancies in the information on effects resulting from floating when comparing advertisement on the internet to scientific evidence. This highlights the importance of further developing scientifically grounded sources of information regarding CAM therapies on the Internet [31].

All in all, this is a rich issue, with research driving integrative medicine forward through findings ranging from under the microscope to the wider issues which directly affect clinical practice and care.

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