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REASONS GIVEN BY HYPERTENSIVE PATIENTS SEEN AT NATALSPRUIT HOSPITAL, GAUTENG, FOR CONCURRENTLY USING TRADITIONAL MEDICINES

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OBJECTIVE: In 2007, while working at Natalspruit Hospital, the researcher observed that a large number of hypertensive patients seen at the hospital had poor adherence to their anti-hypertension treatment. The poor adherence manifested itself through poor blood pressure control on examination. On enquiry, they would reveal that they were also taking traditional medicines. The study was conducted to explore the reasons given by these patients receiving treatment for hypertension for concurrently using traditional medicine.

METHODS: Interviews were conducted among nine purposefully selected interviewees who were attending treatment at the Natalspruit Hospital. The interviews were audio-taped. The exploratory question was: *"What are your reasons for taking traditional medicine in combination with hypertensive treatment you are receiving?"* *"Lebaka ke eng le etsang gore udirise ditlhare tsa setho udi tlhakantse le etsa blood pressure?"* (Southern Sotho version). *"Kungani usebenzise imithi yesintu, uyihlanganise nalena esikunika yona ekukwelapheni isifo se high blood pressure?"* (Zulu version). The transcribed and translated scripts were handed to an independent research assistant to verify the correctness of the translated (English) version of each interview, making cross reference to the audio taped interviews for clarifications. Analysis of the translated data was followed by "cut and paste" method to obtain the themes that emerged from the interviews. The themes and the supporting quotations from the text formed the basis of the write up of the dissertation.

RESULTS: Reasons given by the hypertensive patients on anti-hypertensive medication were that:

- Traditional healers from whom they obtained the traditional medication were good in establishing rapport with them as their clients.
- Traditional medicines were easily accessible and also perceived as an effective remedy for hypertension.
- Traditional healers were found to be confident and readily available educators about the traditional medicines.
- The patients found traditional medicine to be helpful in counteracting the side effects (e.g.cough) they experienced while taking some anti-hypertension medication.
- Patients thought that the two types of medicines (western and traditional) complemented each other as treatment for hypertension.
- By combining the two, patients reported that they were "trying to get a cure" for their hypertension.
- The patients were disappointed by the bad attitude of the hospital staff towards them, leading them to seek help also from traditional healers, ending up with the combination of western and traditional treatments.

CONCLUSION: Patients at Natalspruit Hospital used traditional medicines concurrently with the western anti-hypertensive medication because the former were readily accessible, helped counteract side-effect of western medication and perceived the two types to be complementary to each other. They found traditional healers who produced the traditional medicines to be friendly, readily available and confident teachers on the traditional medicines, and were disappointed by the bad attitude of the hospital staff.

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