

# Complementary and Alternative Medicine Modality Use and Beliefs Among African American Prostate Cancer Survivors

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**Purpose/Objectives:** To examine the cultural beliefs and attitudes of African American prostate cancer survivors regarding the use of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) modalities.

**Research Approach:** Mixed methods with primary emphasis on a phenomenology approach.

**Setting:** In-person interviews in participants' homes and rural community facilities.

**Participants:** 14 African American men diagnosed with and treated for prostate cancer.

**Methodologic Approach:** Personal interviews using a semistructured interview guide.

**Main Research Variables:** Prostate cancer, CAM, African American men's health, culture, herbs, prayer, spirituality, and trust.

**Findings:** All participants used prayer often; two men used meditation and herbal preparations. All men reported holding certain beliefs about different categories of CAM. Several men were skeptical of CAM modalities other than prayer. Four themes were revealed: importance of spiritual needs as a CAM modality to health, the value of education in relation to CAM, importance of trust in selected healthcare providers, and how men decide on what to believe about CAM modalities.

**Conclusions:** Prayer was a highly valued CAM modality among African American prostate cancer survivors as a way to cope with their disease. Medical treatment and trust in healthcare providers also were found to be important.

**Interpretation:** Most participants were skeptical of CAM modalities other than prayer. Participants expressed a strong belief in spirituality and religiosity in relationship to health and their prostate cancer. Participants' trust in their healthcare providers was important. Healthcare providers must understand how African Americans decide what to believe about CAM modalities to improve their health. This research provided valuable information for future development of culturally sensitive communication and infrastructural improvements in the healthcare system.

Prostate cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer among men in the United States. The American Cancer Society (2007) estimated that in 2007, 218,890 men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer in the United States and approximately 27,050 men will die from the disease, making it the second leading cause of cancer death among all men. The age-adjusted incidence of prostate cancer from 1998–2002 was 272 per 100,000 among African Americans compared to 169 per 100,000 among Caucasians (Ries et al., 2006). Furthermore, prostate cancer mortality rates in African

## Key Points . . .

- ▶ Cultural and complementary therapy beliefs are important in the way that African Americans think about their health.
- ▶ African Americans may use complementary modalities to treat their prostate cancer or other health-related problems, which is important information for healthcare professionals.
- ▶ Spirituality and prayer play a vital role in many African Americans that can be advantageous and deleterious.

Americans are at least two times higher than in Caucasians (American Cancer Society; Ries et al.). Prostate cancer affects African American men disproportionately, especially when compared to Caucasians.

Reasons for increased prostate cancer incidence and mortality among African American men are unclear. Distrust of the medical system, complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) beliefs, poverty, limited education, and prior health experiences contribute to existing disparities in mortality rates (Agho & Lewis, 2001; Farkas, Marcella, & Rhoads, 2000; Jones & Wenzel, 2005; Kendall & Hatton, 2002; Kinney, Emery, Dudley, & Croyle, 2002; Marks, 2002; Wolff et al., 2003).

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