Usage of herbal medicines in older adults in Singapore

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Herbal medicines(HM) are a complementary and alternative medicine(CAM) modality that will likely play greater roles in older adults' care. HM's oral nature coupled with age-related pharmacological changes, comorbidities and polypharmacy put older adults at risk of drug-herb interactions, adverse reactions and hospitalisations. However, current studies focus largely on CAM use in the general population. **OBJECTIVE** To investigate the utilisation patterns and factors associated with HM use of older adults in Singapore. **METHODS** A cross-sectional study of subjects from Association between Diet and Health Status study (project 10-517). Sociodemographic and health variables were collected from project 10-517 and telephone interviews regarding HM utilisation were conducted on corresponding subjects. Inclusion criteria of subjects were (1) no intervention study participation (2) written consent for follow-up and (3) verbal consent. Exclusion criteria included (1) inability to contact/interview after ≥3 attempts and (2) inability to speak on phone. **RESULTS** 509 subjects were interviewed. Subjects' mean age was 67±6 years old. 12 month HM prevalence was 60.1%. Top 3 HM included American ginseng (n=161,52.6%), wolfberry (n=104,34.0%) and codonopsis (n=69,22.5%). They were mainly used for health improvement with high satisfaction levels. Sociodemographic predictor variables included gender (female,OR:3.199,CI:2.021-5.065), age (≥76 years old, OR:0.444,CI:0.198–0.997) and high social activities level (high, OR:1.964,CI:1.012–3.813). Health predictor factors included family history of dementia (OR:3.157,CI:1.036–9.618), improvement of self-rated health (OR:1.799,CI:1.020–3.173) and specific chronic conditions like arthritis (OR:1.994,CI:1.039-3.823) and cancer (OR:0.367,CI:0.148-0.911). **CONCLUSION** HM utilisation patterns, sociodemographic and health predictor variables found in this study can aid healthcare professionals to identify potential/current HM users and initiate individualised education/consultation on safe HM use among older adults.



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