

Media Release

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Use of complementary medicines by diabetes and heart patients

Monash University researchers are leading a study to investigate how people use complementary and alternative medicines (CAM) in conjunction with conventional medicine.

The project, known as CAMELOT (Complementary and Alternative Medicine, Economics, Lifestyle and Other Therapeutic approaches for chronic conditions), is funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and is in partnership with Diabetes Australia-Victoria, Heart Support Australia, and the Chronic Illness Alliance. Preliminary findings from an ongoing survey of Victorians with Type 2 diabetes or cardiovascular conditions have been released.

CAMELOT's chief investigator, medical anthropologist Professor Lenore Manderson said the study team, which includes researchers from La Trobe University in Melbourne, is interested to know more about what people are doing to manage these conditions, including use of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM).

"The survey results so far indicate that most people who consult with CAM practitioners believe the treatment relieves their symptoms (74%), increases their knowledge about their problem (60%), and makes them feel more confident about managing their condition (56%). Given these results and efforts being made to educate the public to better manage their health, it may be an oversight to overlook CAM in the current national health reform agenda," Professor Manderson said.

Professor Manderson said "most people with these chronic conditions who use CAMs do so in conjunction with other pharmaceutical drugs, and many do not tell their doctor about their CAM use. A common reason for not informing doctors is because of a perception that doctors are anti-CAM. This suggests that there is some way to go to build better understanding between the medical profession and the growing CAM industry."

Complementary and alternative medicines sometimes referred to as holistic, integrative or natural therapies are used by an estimated 70 per cent of Australians. CAM therapies include vitamins, minerals and herbal supplements, and such practices as naturopathy, homoeopathy, acupuncture, aromatherapy, reflexology, massage, chiropractic, meditation, Tai chi, yoga and spiritual healing.

"The relationship between CAM and conventional medicine is complex. With just under a month of data collection left, we want to hear from as many people as possible with Type 2 diabetes or cardiovascular conditions – including people with high blood pressure or high cholesterol managed with medication," Professor Manderson said.

Victorian residents with these conditions who want to know more about the study or want a questionnaire posted to them can contact Rachel Canaway or Jennifer Moral on 1800 887 356 or access the questionnaire online at www.camelot.monash.edu.au until the 15th July 2010. Use of CAM is not a prerequisite to contribute to the study.

To arrange an interview with Professor Manderson, contact Samantha Blair Media and Communications, Monash University on: + 61 3 9903 4841.