

DIFFERENCES IN HERBAL USE BETWEEN WHITE AND BLACK AMERICAN WOMEN: SECONDARY DATA ANALYSIS

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Key Words – herbal, older women, secondary analysis

Purpose: The purpose of the study was to compare the difference in the use of herbal products between older white (WA) and black (AA) American women in a community setting.

Method: Two sets of data were combined and used as a source for secondary analysis. One set of data was collected in 1998 and another set during 2002 by Yoon and Horne. The sample consisted of 85 older WA women and 58 older AA women. Questionnaires were completed on 143 subjects by investigators via face-to-face visits. The questionnaire included the use of herbal products, health status of the participants, the use of conventional (prescribed and over-the-counter) medicines, and demographic data.

Findings: There were similarities and differences in the use of herbals between White American women and Black American women. Of the WA women, 45.3% used herbal products in the past 12 months, compared to 33.3% of the AA women who used herbal products in the past 12 months. Glucosamine, Garlic, Aloe, and Gingko were the four most popular supplements among subjects. The major reason for using supplements was to prevent potential health problems. However, many herbals were used to treat actual health problems. The top five chronic health conditions reported by AA women were arthritis, hypertension, fatigue, back problems, memory, and obesity; while arthritis, allergies, fatigue, back problems, and digestive problems were the most prevalent conditions among WA subjects. Differences in perceived health status, sources to obtain information about use of herbals, and use of conventional medications were also found between WA and AA women. Both WA and AA women reported only 27.6% and 41% (respectively) of the herbal products they used to their health care providers.

Discussion: It is important for health care providers to be knowledgeable of herbals and to be open-minded in their communication with persons who use herbal products in order to provide safe and comprehensive health care. It is crucial to understand that the use of herbals in older women is more prevalent than health care providers realize.