



Aromatherapy in Palliative Care: A Fragrant Quest for Relief

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Short Communication

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Abbreviations

CIM: Complementary and Integrative Medicine; WHO: World Health Organization; SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals.

Short Communication

In recent years, complementary and integrative medicine (CIM) comprises of traditional, complementary, and integrative medicine, is gaining prominence worldwide due to its possible holistic benefits. The first Global Summit 2023 on Traditional Medicine hosted by World Health Organization (WHO) concluded with a strong commitment for all traditional medicine systems from diverse partners and stakeholders. Their goal is to facilitate the evidence-based traditional, complementary, and integrative medicine to enhance the progress toward universal health coverage and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. Despite limited scientific evidence supporting the efficacy of CIM, it remains popular especially after COVID pandemic. Patients and their families often believe in the effectiveness of CIM for various health conditions, including cancer and palliative care. Advanced severe symptoms in many diseases significantly impact patients' and their quality of life. At that time many seek CIM interventions for symptom relief, especially when conventional treatments fall short.

Aromatherapy, a subsidiary branch of CIM, garnered attention in recent years due to cultural acceptance across diverse section of societies. It is frequently used alongside conventional medical approaches. Various historical literature, such as the Chinese, Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans mentioned about the effectiveness of aromatic substances for health and healing processes. These cultures explored

the therapeutic properties of essential for various traditions and healing processes [1]. The modern aromatherapy that is largely based on essential oils and related aromatic extracts emerged around early 20th century which is widely associated as complementary therapy and used in spas, clinics, and homes for its therapeutic benefits.

Palliative care which is a specialized approach that focuses on improving the quality of life for individuals going through serious illnesses. The basic purpose of this care is to alleviate symptoms, manage pain, address emotional and spiritual needs, and enhance overall well-being. Palliative care is not limited to end-of-life situations but can be provided alongside curative treatments. Aromatherapy contributes to this comprehensive approach of palliative care, providing comfort and enhancing the well-being of serious ill patients. Aromatherapy involves using essential oils derived from aromatic plants to promote relaxation, reduce anxiety, and provide comfort. In palliative care, aromatherapy can help in managing symptoms such as pain, nausea, anxiety, and insomnia. It can be administered through inhalation using diffusers, cotton pads, topical application by massages, lotions, or even oral care by mouthwashes. The perception about aromatherapy is positive for patients due to its non-invasive nature and pleasant scents. While evidence remains mixed, ongoing studies explore its effectiveness and optimal use in palliative care settings. A systematic review on trials involving 1956 participants was done for evaluating the effect and impact of aromatherapy, massage, and reflexology in palliative care [1,2]. However, evidence remains inconclusive. Mixed results was observed by the massage therapy on anxiety, pain, and quality of life. In case of Reflexology, compared to an active control, showed some pain reduction. In the University Hospital Krems's palliative care unit, aromatherapy is regularly used. Retrospective analysis suggests potential improvements in nausea and vomiting among patients with advanced cancers. New clinical

recommendations await more definitive trial findings. Understanding the best measurement methods for assessing these therapies' effectiveness in palliative care is essential.

Aromatherapy, with its gentle fragrances and soothing properties, plays a vital role in enhancing the well-being of patients facing serious illnesses. Aromatherapy provides holistic comfort beyond physical symptoms. Its calming scents ease anxiety, promote relaxation, and offer emotional support. In the midst of pain and uncertainty, these moments of tranquillity matter profoundly. Unlike some medical interventions, aromatherapy is non-invasive. Patients can inhale essential oils or experience gentle massages without invasive procedures. This gentle approach aligns with the principles of palliative care, emphasizing quality of life. Aromatherapy respects patient preferences. It allows individuals to choose scents that resonate with them, creating a personalized experience. For some, the aroma of lavender brings solace; for others, it's the invigorating scent of citrus. Aromatherapy complements conventional medical treatments. While it doesn't replace medications or therapies, it enhances overall well-being. Patients find solace in the sensory journey it offers. Despite its popularity, robust evidence remains elusive. Rigorous studies are needed to clarify aromatherapy's effects on specific symptoms and patient outcomes. Defining optimal dosages, delivery methods, and safety profiles is essential. Standardization ensures consistent benefits across diverse patient populations. Integrating aromatherapy into clinical guidelines requires evidence-based recommendations. Bridging this gap will enhance its acceptance and accessibility.

The quest regarding the mechanistic routes of aromatherapy's remains elusive. While we know that essential oils contain bioactive compounds, their precise effects on the body are not fully understood. Researchers explore factors such as olfactory receptors, absorption pathways, and interactions with neurotransmitters. However, more rigorous studies are needed to unravel these

mechanisms. A systematic review analyzed 22 trials involving 1956 participants. The focus was on aromatherapy, massage, and reflexology in palliative care. Findings were inconsistent, with varying effects on symptoms like pain, anxiety, and quality of life. Heterogeneity across studies highlights the need for further research. A 2012 meta-analysis raised questions about aromatherapy's lasting benefits. However, it's essential to recognize that research evolves over time. Newer evidence may provide a more nuanced understanding of aromatherapy's impact on patients' well-being. Some studies propose textiles (such as clothing or bedding) as carriers for essential oils. This method allows gradual release and prolonged exposure. Challenges include determining optimal textiles, dosages, and safety profiles. Research gaps persist. Despite limited studies specifically addressing nausea and vomiting in palliative care, aromatherapy remains popular. Patient preferences and cultural beliefs contribute to its continued use. Cochrane reviews consider aromatherapy an additional option for managing postoperative nausea and vomiting [2,3]. While evidence isn't definitive, it highlights the need for personalized approaches in patient care.

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