

ABSTRACT

**A SURVEY OF SELF-CARE RESPONSES AND HEALTH PERCEPTIONS
AMONG USERS OF ALTERNATIVE THERAPY AND CONVENTIONAL
MEDICAL SERVICES IN ST. ANDREW**

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Consultation with alternative therapists appears to be common place. This cross-sectional survey explored the health perceptions and self-care responses to illness among users of alternative therapy and conventional medical services.

Data were collected by a self-administered questionnaire to 74 users of alternative therapy and 99 from general practitioners. These indicated that users of alternative care were more likely to have the felt-need to improve their health by dietary changes ($p < 0.0002$), and to report improvement in their dietary habits in response to chronic illness ($p < 0.02$). Further, users of conventional medicine were more likely to mention their "family" as being responsible for their personal health ($p < 0.03$).

There were no statistically significant differences between respondents from alternative care and conventional medical care with respect to age, sex, education and income among others. Users of alternative care reported similar demand for professional medical care in the past year as did the respondents from medical care. These results indicate the presence of alternative therapy practitioners in Jamaica with a responsive patient population and that the practice of self-medication is common to both groups of patients. It was recommended that a regulatory body be set up to govern the practice of alternative therapy in Jamaica and that the public be guided in its practice of self-medication.