Women’s use of complementary and alternative medicine products and services during pregnancy: Insights for safe, informed maternity care

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Technology Sydney
Certificate of original authorship

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Student:

Jane Elizabeth Frawley

June 2015
Statement of contributions to jointly authored works contained in the thesis

The results from this thesis have been submitted for publication in peer-reviewed journals through five discrete manuscripts, presented in Chapters 4 through 8. For each of these papers, I have been primarily responsible for determining the research question, undertaking the analysis and drafting the manuscript.

I have received support in all of these areas by Professor Jon Adams, Professor David Sibbritt and Dr Jon Wardle. Dr Amie Steel has also assisted with data interpretation and final stages of manuscript drafting as needed. Professor Alex Broom and Professor Cindy Gallois have provided additional support with drafting and finalising the submitted/published manuscripts contained within this thesis.

I take full responsibility in the accuracy of the findings presented in these publications and this thesis.

Published works by the author incorporated into the thesis

Of the drafted manuscripts contained in this thesis, all have been submitted for publication of which two are published, two have been resubmitted with revisions and one is one under review. Following is the list of manuscripts contained in this thesis:


Other relevant published works by the author not forming part of the thesis

Journal articles

   http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j jbmt.2015.03.004


1,310 Australian women aged 60-65 years. (Under review at Complementary Therapies in Medicine).

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.srhc.2015.04.002


Scholarly book chapters


Published conference abstracts


8. **Frawley J, Steel A (2013)** The use of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) for Inflammatory Bowel Disease: an Australian survey. *Forschende Komplementarmedizin* 20(suppl 1), 68


Abbreviations

ABS – Australian Bureau of Statistics
AHPRA – Australian Health Practitioners Regulation Agency
AIDS – Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
AIHW – Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
ALSWH – Australian Longitudinal Study on Women’s Health
ART – assisted reproductive technologies
ARTG – Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods
ASGC - Australian Standard Geographical Classification
CAM – Complementary and alternative medicine
CI – Confidence interval
GP – General practitioner
HIV – Human immunodeficiency virus
HRT - hormone replacement therapy
HSR – Health services research
NCCAM - National Centre for Complementary and Alternative Medicine’s
NIH – National Institute of Health
OR – Odds ratio
PHI – private health insurance
RCT – Randomised-controlled trial
TGA – Therapeutic Goods Administration
US – United States
UK – United Kingdom
Acknowledgements

I am indebted to many people who have helped me during my PhD candidature.

Thank-you to my supervisors, Professor David Sibbritt, Professor Jon Adams and Dr Jon Wardle who have not only guided me with patience and expertise but who have shaped me as a researcher and academic. Thank-you for enabling me to do this work, and for the many invaluable insights into the bigger world of research, post PhD.

Thank-you to my husband Tom; thanks for a cup of tea every morning and for everything else. Thank-you to our beautiful son Joseph; he has now come to terms with the disappointment that being a doctor does not mean coming home with an ambulance. Thank-you both for your continuous encouragement and understanding, and for constantly reminding me of the wondrous world outside.

I also wish to acknowledge and thank Dr Amie Steel who I have worked with on many projects over the past three years; it was fun and your help and support was invaluable. Finally, I am incredibly grateful to my wider family, especially to my parents John and Elizabeth Daley and my parents-in-law Peter and Diane Frawley. Thank-you for the immeasurable love and support you have shown to me throughout this journey and always.
Abstract

Aim: The aim of this project is to explore the use of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) products and services by women during pregnancy, with a focus upon: determining the current prevalence of CAM use and examining the determinants, characteristics and attitudes of women who use CAM; investigating the utilisation of various information sources used by pregnant women to make decisions about the use of CAM; and examining the extent to which pregnant women choose to self-prescribe certain CAM products.

Method: The study sample was obtained via the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women’s Health (ALSWH). The ALSWH is a longitudinal study of women in three age groups (“young” 18-23, “mid age” 45-50 and “older” 70-75 years), who were randomly selected from the Australian national Medicare database to investigate multiple factors affecting health and wellbeing of women over a 20-year period. This research project analyses data from a sub-study survey administered in 2010. Participants in the sub-study were identified based upon their reporting of being pregnant or as having recently given birth in the 2009 ALSWH Survey 5 (n=2,316) of the young cohort. A total of 1,835 women responded to the sub-study survey and were included in the analysis (79.2% response rate).

Results: CAM use during pregnancy is high with 91.7% (n=1,485) of women using a CAM product (52.0% excluding vitamins and minerals) and 48.1% (n=623) of women
consulting a CAM practitioner. CAM practitioner visits were more likely for selected pregnancy-related health concerns, namely back pain or backache, and neck pain. Employment was also found to be predictive of pregnant women’s visits to a CAM practitioner. Significant health history and demographic predictors of CAM product use were tiredness and fatigue, embarking on preparation for labour and having a university education. Further analysis found that of the 447 women who did consult a CAM practitioner prior to pregnancy 62.4% (n=279) continued to utilise a CAM practitioner during pregnancy. Certain attitudes were found to be associated with women who use CAM products during pregnancy and women were more likely to use herbal medicine if they suffered from anxiety, sleeping problems and/or fatigue. The self-prescription of herbal medicine was also found to be widespread. Of the women deciding whether or not to visit a CAM practitioner, nearly half (48%, n=493) were influenced by their own personal experience of CAM and 43% (n=423) by family and friends.

Conclusion: CAM use by women during pregnancy is high. Maternity health care professionals need to inquire about CAM use during routine antenatal visits in order to ensure safe maternal outcomes.
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