

LIFELONG LEARNING OF COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE

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Abstract:

Introduction: During the last 20 years there has been a significant increase in lifelong learning of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM), with the offer of educational courses also being on the rise. A study involving focus groups was carried out pursuing the following three goals: (i) determine factors for active inclusion in informal education of CAM, (ii) identify the most common factors for active inclusion, (iii) determine differences between the reasons for active inclusion of CAM users and CAM treatment providers.

Methods: The study included focus groups comprising of CAM users and CAM treatment providers and was split into two parts: (i) literature review, identification of active inclusion factors and preparation of questions, (ii) organisation of focus groups with CAM users and structured interviews with CAM treatment providers. The gathered data was processed using text analysis and open-source coding.

Results: The following factors for active inclusion in the process of lifelong learning of CAM were identified in the research: (i) the individual's desire to have more control over one's life, (ii) compliance with CAM philosophy, (iii) partial lack of trust in the healthcare system, (iv) favourable societal support and (v) general tendency to broaden the knowledge, where a discrepancy was observed between CAM users and CAM treatment providers. While users of CAM have a stronger desire to gain control over their lives, treatment providers of CAM show a stronger partial lack of trust in the healthcare system, as well as a stronger compliance with CAM philosophy.

Discussion and conclusion: The identified factors indicate the possible factors for users and treatment providers of CAM to be driven towards lifelong learning of CAM. Since CAM learning has been on the rise for the past two decades, followed closely by an increase in the offer of educational programmes, a better understanding of the active inclusion factors could improve our understanding of these societal changes.

Keywords: *lifelong learning, complementary and alternative medicine, treatment providers and users of complementary and alternative medicine, focus groups, structured interviews, active inclusion factors*