May 20th, 12:30 PM

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The Use of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) and Imported Medications by Brazilians in Massachusetts

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ABSTRACT

Background: The use of CAM products and imported pharmaceuticals has been rising in the United States. These practices are particularly common in Latino populations. This descriptive study sought to investigate the use of pharmaceuticals imported from Brazil and CAM products by the Brazilian population in Massachusetts.

Methods: A brief anonymous survey was administered online via social media and in paper during visits to Brazilian establishments to a sample of first-generation Brazilian immigrants residing in Massachusetts. The survey questionnaire was administered in Portuguese and explored participants’ use of CAM products and imported pharmaceuticals as well as patient disclosure of use to physician.

Results: 595 surveys responses were collected and a total of 540 surveys were included in the statistical analysis. 59.1% of respondents reported having used imported medications from Brazil during their time of residence in the US. The most commonly used classes of imported medications were analgesics and antibiotics. 31.5% of participants reported use of CAM products; most commonly for cold-like symptoms. CAM products and imported medications were most often obtained through friends or relatives who brought them from Brazil. 63.9% of respondents did not inform their physician about their use of imported medications and/or CAM products. The most common reason for not reporting was because the doctor did not ask.

Conclusions: To improve care of Brazilian immigrants, it is essential that US physicians ask patients about the use of imported medications and CAM products. Familiarity with the most commonly used products is important for patient education regarding efficacy, toxicity, and possible drug interactions.

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