**Explaining use of complementary and alternative medicine in Irritable Bowel Syndrome: a common-sense model approach**

Lee Usher, Pauline Fox and Kathryn Mitchell.  University of West London.

Background:  Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) is a prevalent chronic functional gastrointestinal condition.  Conventional medical treatment can be unsuccessful and many of those affected use complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) for symptom relief, despite concerns over CAM treatment efficacy.  An ‘extended’ common-sense model of illness representations (CSM) was used to examine psychological influences on CAM use.

Methods: 653 participants with IBS completed an online survey which included the Revised Illness Perception Questionnaire (IPQ-R), the (general) Beliefs about Medicines Questionnaire (BMQ), the Complementary and Alternative Medicines Beliefs Inventory (CAMBI) and questions regarding CAM use.  Unrelated t-tests compared the illness and treatment perceptions of CAM-users to those not using CAM.  A binary logistic regression analysis examined which factors predicted CAM use.

Findings: 57% of participants reported using CAM to relieve IBS symptoms.  CAM-users reported significantly stronger illness identity, illness consequences, medication harm beliefs and stronger emotional representations.  CAM-users had more positive beliefs about CAM in terms of feelings towards natural treatments, client participation in treatment and beliefs in holistic treatments.  Logistic regression analysis revealed 3-4 years (Odds ratio = 3.62) or over 5 years (3.19) since diagnosis, having A’ levels (1.89) or postgraduate qualifications (2.34), and stronger illness identity (1.10), consequences (1.07), cyclical timeline beliefs (1.08) and medication harm beliefs (1.10) predicted CAM use.

Discussion:  Findings suggest CAM use is influenced by certain illness and treatment perceptions. Health psychology interventions which address these components may have potential to improve IBS symptom management and support patient’s informed decision making regarding treatment.