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The global rise of self-care for health and wellbeing

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Title: The Global Rise of Self-Care for Health and Wellbeing

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Welcome to this European Journal of Integrative Medicine special issue on Self-Care, which we hope readers will enjoy. The concept of self-care is broad and typically refers to the initiatives and activities undertaken by individuals who have as their aim to improve, protect and maintain their health. This can range from treating minor ailments to self-management of long-term chronic conditions. The World Health Organization defines self-care as “the ability of individuals, families and communities to promote health, prevent disease, maintain health, and to cope with illness and disability with or without the support of a healthcare provider”[1]. Self-care, and in particular the self-management of chronic conditions by patients themselves, has become an essential component of national health systems around the world. Many of the most prevalent global chronic illnesses, such as heart disease, diabetes, and asthma, require patients to monitor physical indicators, manage medication regimes and components of their lifestyle such as diet and exercise. Globally we have seen a shift in health policy, with many countries placing greater emphasis on patient self-care and empowerment.

This special issue of the European Journal of Integrative Medicine contains papers which have explored the full spectrum of self-care. Some of the included papers evaluate approaches to the self-management of chronic conditions such as diabetes, cystic fibrosis, chronic pain, epilepsy, HIV and breast cancer. Reviews provide the best method to synthesise research and the 3 reviews in this special issue suggest that self-management may improve quality of life. Radwan et al (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eujim.2020.101269>) report on a systematic review of the effect of different pillow designs on promoting sleep comfort, quality, and spinal alignment. This interesting article identifies the evidence demonstrating that certain pillow parameters could improve sleep quality, spinal alignment, and decrease sleep-related neck pain. A systematic scoping review by Gonot-Schoupinsky et al (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eujim.2020.101144>) provides the evidence for laughter and humour for personal development. Their review presenting growing evidence for the diverse applications and benefits of laughter and humour, with multiple opportunities for self-care and interventional applications described. The last review by Othman et al (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eujim.2020.101228>) a meta-synthesis of qualitative studies was conducted which explored factors affecting self-management among adolescents and youths with type 2 diabetes mellitus. The authors identified intrapersonal factors, interpersonal factors and institutional factors as important, all impacting on self-management, these findings have important implications for healthcare providers.

Following on this theme of diabetes, Tuncay and Avcı (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eujim.2020.101099>) conducted a cross-sectional study of the association between self-care management and life satisfaction in patients with diabetes, with the authors finding that diabetes self-care management is significantly associated with life satisfaction levels. Cystic fibrosis is another long term condition and Ronan et al's (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eujim.2020.101229>) qualitative study explored the use of tai chi as a self-management intervention. Their findings revealed that both face-to-face and internet delivered tai chi lessons were equally well received by patients, with both being perceived as beneficial in the self-management of cystic fibrosis. Matiz et al's (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eujim.2020.101168>) pilot trial compared two self-management interventions (self-body brushing and mindfulness-oriented meditation) with no treatment. Self-body brushing lead to improvements in several aspects of self-reported interoceptive awareness and was at least as good as mindfulness meditation training. A qualitative service evaluation by Hughes and Davy (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eujim.2020.101106>) of self-acupuncture for chronic pain indicates that patients were able to successfully apply self-acupuncture. In addition they perceived the intervention

as assisting them to manage their symptoms of pain, and additionally they reported improvements to their lifestyle and quality of life.

Other studies in this special issue looked at wider components of self-care, including the health protective measures undertaken by patients. The qualitative study by Hughes et al (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eujim.2020.101246>) explored patients' perceptions of self-care. The study identifying five dimensions to patients' concept of self-care, and the factors which had facilitated or hindered the initiation of self-care activities. Xiao et al (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eujim.2020.101199>) explored whether mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) could be a useful self-care tool for perimenopausal women experiencing depressive moods. Their findings indicating that learning MBSR had a positive impact on patients' levels of anxiety, depression and sleep disturbance. With the frequency of self-practice being associated with the magnitude of symptom relief. While Donald et al (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eujim.2020.101088>) report on a mixed methods feasibility study of MBSR as a self-management strategy for people living with HIV. The authors finding that MBSR could also be feasible, acceptable, and potentially effective for people living with HIV in the UK. Turton et al (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eujim.2020.101167>) conducted a comparative audit of mental health and resilience outcomes for the novel self-care intervention, emotional logic, which teaches people how unpleasant loss emotions can have useful purposes that enable healthy adjustments to changing circumstances. The authors finding that emotional logic improved the quality of social connections and mental health. A qualitative study exploring the experiences of participants in a Classical Chinese medicine (CCM) community healthcare program delivered in rural Scotland is reported by Harvie et al (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eujim.2020.101158>). Their study suggests that individuals engaged in a CCM community healthcare program may experience improved physical and emotional health outcomes and may feel motivated to adopt CCM self-care practices through program elements which enhance self-efficacy.

Elsewhere in the issue Barth et al (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eujim.2020.101109>) report on a survey of therapists in Switzerland which explored the different types of complementary therapies provided across the country and identified the most relevant complaints treated by therapists, their job satisfaction and satisfaction concerning collaborations with medical doctors. Garrido et al (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eujim.2020.101148>) conducted a mixed methods cross sectional study of the use of non-conventional therapies in women with breast cancer in Barcelona. The study identifying the reasons why women used non-conventional therapies, as well as factors associated with their use. The usability of a pharmaceutical-complementary medicines interactions database, IMgateway, by women with breast cancer was investigated in a survey by O'Brien et al (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eujim.2019.101004>). The findings from the study indicating that, with refinement, the database has the potential to empower individuals to be proactive in management of their health conditions, including mitigating risks associated with potential pharmaceutical-complementary medicine interactions.

Overweight and obesity are on the rise worldwide, and finally Akour et al (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eujim.2020.101086>) conducted a cross-sectional survey in Jordan on the patterns and perceived efficacy of herbal medicine and other complementary medicine approaches for weight loss and maintenance. With the study providing, for the first time, an insight about the diverse range of remedies used to manage weight in Jordanian society, and how these therapies are utilized in relation to allopathic care.

Despite the global shift in health policies to a greater emphasis on self-care interventions, there remains much research which needs to be conducted to ascertain the safety and effectiveness of the various self-care interventions available, as well as individuals' perceptions and preferences. The studies

published in this self-care special issue will contribute to this process, and we hope that readers find the published research of interest.

[1] World Health Organization. What do we mean by self-care? <https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/self-care-interventions/definitions/en/>, 2020 (accessed 1st May, 2020).

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