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“Not on my own”: women's experience of herbal practice as participants in a randomised controlled trial

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Abstract

Aims

To identify predominant themes in the experience of participants during the treatment process of menopausal problems by herbal practitioners.

Methods

“Not on my own” is a nested qualitative study within “Changing with Herbs” (a pragmatic randomised controlled pilot study of the effectiveness of treatment of menopausal symptoms by herbal practitioners). Treatment consisted of a 5 month individually tailored, holistic course of treatment from 1 of 3 local members of the National Institute of Medical Herbalists, and was found to be effective. Treatment by herbal practitioners is multi-faceted and develops over time within a therapeutic relationship. To examine this complex system in greater depth, participants completed feedback questionnaires at the end of treatment. A sub-sample of 8 participants from the treatment arm was interviewed about their experiences of herbal treatment during this trial. Interviewees (mean age 57) were predominately white professionals; 3 had never previously taken herbal medicines and 5 had. Interviews were recorded, and transcripts were subject to thematic analysis by 2 researchers. This poster discusses the experience of the participants receiving a package of care from qualified herbal practitioners for menopausal symptoms.

Results

Themes emerging of the participants’ experience of treatment by herbal practitioners include: satisfaction with the treatment outcomes, holistic nature of the consultation, patient centred nature of the process, development of the therapeutic relationship, empowerment from changing behaviour such as diet, management techniques and connections with wider agencies in appropriate referral. Negative themes were few, including the taste of herbal medicine and the perceived expense were it not provided by the NHS.

Conclusion

The treatment package from herbal practitioners for menopausal symptoms was acceptable to the participants in the study, who felt it should be a choice supported by the NHS. The whole treatment system was complex, responsive to individual need and evolved over time.

Trial registration

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