

## Impact of Medical Students' Attitude on Referral Intention to Traditional Healers and Traditional Medicine: A Case Study

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**ABSTRACT** Collaboration between traditional healers (TH) and medical doctors is encouraged by the South African Government. The objective of this study was to investigate the frequency and determinants of referral intention of medical students to traditional healers. This cross-sectional study was conducted among medical students from Walter Sisulu University, Mthatha. Socio-demographic factors, ethnicity, beliefs, practices, attitude of students, friends, parents and villagers were the potential explanatory variables in univariate and multivariate analyses. Out of a sample of 98 medical students, only 15% indicated willingness to refer parents and friends to traditional healers. Gender, age, religion, province and district did not influence the referral intention. Positive attitude of friends ( $p=0.031$ ), of villagers ( $p=0.047$ ), of students ( $p=0.004$ ), on consulting traditional healers ( $p<0.001$ ) and beliefs of students in Traditional Medicine (TM) ( $p=0.002$ ) were the significant correlates of referral intention. However, after adjusting for confounding factors, only positive attitude of medical students to TM was found to be the significant and independent determinant of referral intention to traditional healers. The data lead to the conclusion that referral intention to TH and TM was very low among medical students. Therefore, intervention for integrative medicine should begin with medical students to develop a positive attitude towards TM, the important and significant determinant of referral intention to TH/TM. If doctors recognize the effectiveness of CAM in the management of some illnesses, the current gap between both medical approaches will get narrowed.