

Rapid Assessment of Alternative Medicine Through a Comparison of the Expected and Observed Progress of Patients: A Feasibility Study of the Prognosis/Follow-Up Method

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Objective and method: To test an unusual research design in assessing alternative care, in a classic Arabic medicine clinic in Mauritania. The need for a common language between alternative and standard (modern) practitioners, as well as patients, led to the development of a relative patient progress scale. Patient-observed progress under alternative treatment was compared to expected progress (prognosis) by alternative and standard practitioners.

Results: With a follow-up rate of 55 of 80 patients, alternative and standard practitioners had 86% agreement in judging patient progress ($\kappa = 0.46$). Sixty-two percent (62%) of patients progressed as well or better than expected with standard medicine, according to standard practitioners. Classic Arabic medicine was found to be safe; standard practitioners observed signs of imminent danger in two patients only, one of whom was referred to the modern hospital, and the other not, by his own will. In the course of this study, CAM and standard practitioners started a weekly joint consultation.

Conclusion: The prognosis/follow-up method is useful for the assessment of alternative medicine, especially when a study with a control group is impractical. It provides practitioners from different medical systems with elements of a common language. It may facilitate collaboration and appropriate referral between alternative and standard practitioners.