

كلية طب وايل كورنيل في قطر Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar

Member of Qatar Foundation

Press Release

Widespread use of supplements among college students in Qatar

Doha – April 14, 2015: There is widespread use of nutritional and herbal supplements among college students in Qatar, with some even believing supplements are more effective and safer than conventional medicine in treating certain diseases.

The collaborative research was conducted by Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar (WCMC-Q), College of the North Atlantic in Qatar, and Qatar University and involved a sample of 419 students of both genders and various nationalities.

Nutritional and herbal supplements include products like multivitamins, ginger, mint, fish oil and protein powders. The research found that of those 419 students, 208 (49.6%) had used a supplement at some time in their lives, and 137 (32.7%) were regular or current users.

There were also significant numbers who believed that supplements were sometimes more effective than conventional medicines. Of those polled, almost 60 per cent would choose supplements over conventional medicine when trying to lose weight, almost 45 per cent would choose them for treating colds and influenza and 30 per cent for diabetes.

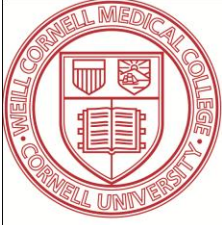
Dr. Ravinder Mamtani, Associate Dean for Global and Public Health and Professor of Healthcare Policy and Research at WCMC-Q, said the results merit attention and that healthcare professionals should be aware of the prevalent use of supplements.

Dr. Mamtani said: A vast majority of students believe that these supplements are safer and more effective than conventional medicines, but that is not always the case. In addition, herbal and nutritional supplements are not always regulated as stringently as conventional medicines, which have to go through numerous laboratory tests and controlled trials before they can be prescribed.

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“Supplements can also interfere with the efficacy of conventional medicines in certain cases. Physicians and other health care professionals need to be aware that their patients may well be taking these supplements and ask about them accordingly.”

While the study did not inquire about the dose of supplements taken, Dr. Mamtani said that supplements, when taken appropriately in recommended doses, can be beneficial. For example, Vitamin D and calcium supplements are appropriate for making bones strong and preventing bone loss. But they could even prove harmful if taken incorrectly. Vitamin D, for example, if taken in large doses, can lead to nausea, vomiting, polyuria (excessive urine) and kidney damage. Calcium deposits in the body’s soft tissues can also occur.

He said that in short, people should always consult their physician before taking herbal or nutritional supplements.

The report’s other findings included the fact that women were more likely to take supplements than men, but that there was no difference between nationalities. Dr. Sohaila Cheema, Director of Global and Public Health, co –author said: “The finding of protein supplements use is particularly concerning as they can have unpleasant gastrointestinal effects, but additionally, they have not been shown to have any beneficial effect on athletic performance and strength training.”

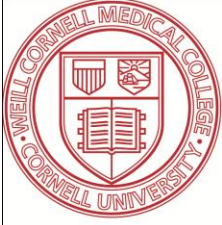
In conclusion the report’s authors said that national guidelines should be developed to incorporate the issue of supplements into the healthcare delivery systems in Qatar. All healthcare practitioners should receive training so they feel comfortable asking patients if they are taking supplements. The public should also be made aware about the appropriate use of supplements and that they should inform the doctor about anything they may be taking when they are prescribed conventional medicines.

The report has been published by the World Health Organization in the *WHO Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal*, and can be read in full at www.emro.who.int/emhj-volume-21-2015/volume-21-issue-1/herbal-and-nutritional-supplement-use-among-college-students-in-qatar.html

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About Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar

Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar is a partnership between Cornell University and Qatar Foundation. It offers pre-medical and medical courses leading to the Cornell University M.D. degree with teaching by Cornell and Weill Cornell faculty and by physicians at Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) and Aspetar Orthopedic and Sports Medicine Hospital who hold Weill Cornell appointments. Through its biomedical research program, WCMC-Q is building a sustainable research community in Qatar while advancing basic science and clinical research. Through its medical college, WCMC-Q seeks to provide the finest education possible for medical students, to improve health care both now and for future generations, and to provide high quality health care to the Qatari population.

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