

To Print: Click your browser's PRINT button.

NOTE: To view the article with Web enhancements, go to:

<http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/537970>

Publication Logo

Traditional Chinese acupuncture works in OA

Zosia Chustecka

Medscape Medical News 2004. © 2004 Medscape

October 19, 2004

San Antonio, TX - Traditional Chinese acupuncture has been shown to be an effective intervention for the relief of pain and improvement in function in patients with symptomatic knee osteoarthritis in a large study funded by the **National Institutes of Health** (NIH) and carried out at the Center for Integrated Medicine at the University of Maryland. Principal investigator **Dr Marc Hochberg** says the results would lead him to recommend acupuncture for a patient who was not being adequately controlled on normal medication—"yes, I would suggest to such patients that they try acupuncture," he says.

It's a big step for mainstream medical practitioners to embrace so wholeheartedly an alternative/complementary therapy and illustrates the lack of options for osteoarthritis—after advice on exercise and weight loss, simple analgesics, and anti-inflammatories, there is little else to offer patients, who are left with pain and stiffness and limited movement.

Hochberg will be reporting at the **American College of Rheumatology 2004 meeting** but gave a summary at an official press conference yesterday. The study stems from more than 13 years of collaboration with 2 other centers and a physician who trained in traditional Chinese acupuncture in Shanghai, **Dr Lixing Lao**. After 2 pilot studies and much discussion about the controls that would be used to test the intervention, the trial was designed with input from both the NIH and the **Center for**

Dr Marc Hochberg

Complementary and Alternative Medicine.

It involved 570 patients with symptomatic knee OA and moderate pain, with a mean age of 65 years, who were already taking analgesics and anti-inflammatories; some were even taking opioid products, Hochberg noted. They were split into 3 groups. One group received traditional Chinese acupuncture with 23 needles inserted at 9 standard points in the area of knee pain, as well as 2 guide tubes tapped at 2 sham points in the abdomen. One control group had sham acupuncture—the same 9 points were targeted, but with guide tubes tapped onto the surface of the skin, with 2 needles inserted in the sham points. The third group received education on lifestyle, exercise, etc, in keeping with best clinical practice as described in the Arthritis Self-Help Course.

After 26 weeks, there was a significant difference between the real and sham acupuncture groups, with a greater decrease in pain subscores and improvements in function subscores on the WOMAC index. On these measures, real acupuncture reduced pain by -3.79 in comparison with -2.92 with the sham procedure ($p=0.003$), while function improved by 12.42 with real vs 9.87 with sham acupuncture (0.009). Both these groups fared significantly better than the education group, but Hochberg said the details of this comparison would appear once the study is published.

There was no difference in adverse effects reported by the 3 groups, he noted, but there was a higher dropout rate in the education group. In addition, patients in the education group increased the use of the medications they were already taking, whereas this remained constant in the 2 acupuncture groups. Asked whether he would have expected a decrease in drug use because of the relief offered by acupuncture, Hochberg said no, the patients had been instructed to continue taking their medications as they did normally, so as not to introduce another variable into the equation.

Acupuncture is one of the most popular of the alternative and complementary therapies in the US, used by an estimated 15 million Americans. It was cited as an acceptable treatment for many pain conditions by an NIH panel in 1997, but previous trials in osteoarthritis have been small and have had methodological limitations, Hochberg commented. The ACR notes that many physicians have doubted its effectiveness, but this study confirms a significant improvement in patients receiving traditional Chinese acupuncture therapy compared with both those who received sham acupuncture and those who received an education program.

Source

1. Hochberg M, Lao L, Bausell B et al Traditional Chinese acupuncture is effective as adjunctive therapy in patients with osteoarthritis of the knee American College of Rheumatology 2004 meeting; October 16-21, 2004; San Antonio, TX; Abstract 1718.

|

