

Original scientific paper

ACUPUNCTURE TREATMENT EFFECTS AND ECONOMIC ADVANTAGES IN TREATING CHRONIC CONDITIONS

Jihe Zhu ¹
Blagica Arsovska
Kristina Kozovska

Abstract

Chronic pain conditions impose a huge economic burden on affected individuals and society and is very significant. With this research paper we raise awareness of the effectiveness, safety and benefits of acupuncture for the treatment of chronic diseases. Acupuncture has been proven to be an exceptionally effective treatment option, especially for the following health issues: chronic pain, allergies, asthma, stress, anxiety, depression, migraines insomnia, hypertension, menopause and etc. Acupuncture has a great ability to create a feeling of relief from discomfort and pain. The treatment also targets the root of the illness and restores normal body functions. Acupuncture, as a treatment for chronic diseases incurable according to the WHO, works very effectively and positively, although the treatments are longer, the benefits for the patients are enormous on the one hand due to the improvement of the health condition and on the other hand due to the greater economic advantage and profitability. For these reasons, more and more people in the world decide to treat chronic diseases with acupuncture. A very important step is to share the knowledge and experience for TCM and enable the population to gain more knowledge about the treatment advantages and gradually accept it as a valuable health care treatment.

Keywords: acupuncture, traditional Chinese medicine, efficacy, costs, safety

JEL classification: I12, I18, I38, D61, H51

INTRODUCTION

Chronic pain conditions impose a huge economic burden on affected individuals and society. The economic factor is very important and for these patients it is necessary to provide safe, effective and affordable treatments [1]

Acupuncture has long been used as an effective therapeutic tool for treating conditions of different severity and types. In PR China, traditional Chinese medicine (as well acupuncture as a component) is used to treat chronic conditions in primary care. The acupuncturists should always be trained in traditional Chinese medicine {TCM} and be an excellent source for complementary treatment in chronic conditions.

Acupuncture has been proven to be an exceptionally effective treatment option, especially for the following health issues: chronic pain, allergies, asthma, stress, anxiety, depression, migraines insomnia, hypertension, menopause and etc. Acupuncture has a

¹Jihe Zhu, Ph.D.; Blagica Arsovska, Ph.D.; Kristina Kozovska, Center of Traditional Chinese Medicine and acupuncture ‘Tong Da Tang’, Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia.

great ability to create a feeling of relief from discomfort and pain. The treatment also targets the root of the illness and restores normal body functions.

Acupuncture has no unpleasant side effects (or are very rare), making it a perfect option for the patients who seek to prevent progression of the illnesses or symptoms leading to the need for more invasive treatments, also for those who are looking for more regular support for keeping in balance and harmony their overall well-being. [2]

For chronic pain, which is the most common, there is still no permanent solution and no medicine that can manage it. The Western medicine medications are composed of non-steroidal anti-inflammatories and non-opiate analgesic medications, which are not fully effective. With more compounds like analgesics and opioids the side effects increase. [1]

The world currently is facing a huge opioid epidemic, and medical systems need to find non-pharmacologic solutions that can be employed to minimize the people's opioid dependence. Acupuncture has shown to be a powerful, cost-effective, safe, evidence-based and available treatment method fitting to this need. Acupuncture as a treatment option for the management of various types of chronic pain conditions, has been shown to be very effective. The mechanisms by which acupuncture works, have been studied and explained and are understandable from physiologic and biomedical perspectives. [3]

1. MATERIAL AND METHODS

A literature survey of already completed research was carried out using economic and health databases, with an additional manual search.

With this paper we want to raise awareness of the effectiveness and benefits of acupuncture for the treatment of chronic diseases.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the countries like Republic of North Macedonia, where acupuncture and TCM are not integrated into the public health care system, the treatment is usually purchased privately by the patients and also may be covered by private or employer-based health insurance policies. [1] Despite the TCM being mainly excluded from Western public health care systems, a lot of people facing chronic disease look for acupuncture treatment. [3]

TCM and its treatment options for pain have been around for thousands of years. TCM has been used throughout history to treat many conditions and health problems. Acupuncture as well as tai chi, tui na, gua sha, cupping and osteopathy, appear to be an equitable alternative to opioids for treatment of chronic pain conditions. Although acupuncture as a treatment has been used in many clinical diseases, it is mostly used for management of chronic pain. [4]

Studies show that acupuncture as part of the TCM, has shown to be effective in the treatment of short-term pain relief in headache, low back pain, chronic osteoarthritis of the knee and other. In numerous cases the pain relief was on longer term at 6 to 12 months. [1] Patients have described improvements in their physiologic condition, such as increased relaxation and calmness, increased energy, reduced intake of prescribed drugs, accelerated healing from surgery, reduction of frequent colds, increased self-awareness, increased sense of balance, wholeness, well-being, centeredness and comprehensive life changes. [5]

In a study where patients who used acupuncture for chronic conditions were surveyed, they stated that felt a huge improvement effect on the affecting symptoms, especially mental, emotional, and well-being changes. The patients had chronic conditions for 1–40 years (11 years in average) including psoriasis, musculoskeletal problems, emotional problems, asthma, headaches, fatigue, subfertility, abdominal distension and other. The satisfaction was also enormous because of the pleasant and close doctor-patient working relationship and the holistic style of treatment provided. The greatest satisfaction comes from the possibilities that acupuncture provides by improving the quality of life and prevention of diseases. [5]

In patients with chronic prostatitis and pelvic pain syndrome, a study showed that approximate 20 sessions of acupuncture over 8 weeks are needed. The treatments resulted in huge symptoms improvement, with durable effects 6 months after treatment. [6] Studies are suggesting that for better outcomes, doses are important, meaning more sessions and increased number of needles. [7]

Although in today's society exists a certain degree of fear or skepticism about TCM; plenty of researches and studies continue to prove the amazing results and many benefits of the treatments every day. The main purpose of acupuncture as part of the TCM is to balance the underlying Qi imbalances by clearing the external factors, removing the blockages from the meridians, balancing the internal emotions, balancing the hormones, releasing the flow of the Qi and blood, reducing the pain and inflammation and etc. TCM doctors and practitioners are analyzing the balance of the mind, body and spirit to find a way and proper treatment to restore the Qi energy, Yin/Yang balance and the good health. The benefits from acupuncture treatment are numerous: pain reduction, stress release, increased fertility, increased immunity, reduced depression and anxiety, good muscle strength, flexibility, balance and other.

Lately, numerous medical schools from all around the world recognize the importance of TCM training and practice and implement it in their program for the employees and students, so they can effectively work and prevent diseases and influence on the overall physical, mental, social, emotional and spiritual health of society. TCM and Western medicine are two important health care systems, with no need to be replaced with one another and both should be treated as equal and complementary. TCM is a very old and original science and its research scopes differ from those of Western medicine. According to TCM the aim of the treatment is to prevent and treat the disease in time and to not allow it to become serious.

The TCM has a holistic approach and the treatment regimen can be used in various diseases or syndromes having similar basic mechanisms such as, insulin resistance that shares several conditions, including hypertension, diabetes, atherosclerosis, obesity and hyperlipidemia. The key to successful treatment in TCM is to be individual for each patient.

Therefore, a very important step is to share the knowledge and experience for TCM and enable the population to gain more knowledge about the treatment advantages and gradually accept it as a valuable health care treatment. [8]

CONCLUSION

Acupuncture, as a treatment for chronic diseases incurable according to the WHO, works very effectively and positively, although the treatments are longer, the benefits for the patients are enormous on the one hand due to the improvement of the health condition

and on the other hand due to the greater economic advantage and profitability. For these reasons, more and more people in the world decide to treat chronic diseases with acupuncture. Quality education is especially important for working with Chinese medicine. Acupuncture is a cost-effective option treatment for the chronic pain conditions.

Source of funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for profit sectors.

Conflict of interest

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Acknowledgement

None.

REFERENCES

- Ambrosio EMM, Bloor K, MacPherson H; Costs and consequences of acupuncture as a treatment for chronic pain: A systematic review of economic evaluations conducted alongside randomised controlled trials; *Complementary Therapies in Medicine* Volume 20, Issue 5, October 2012, Pages 364-374
- Stram Center for Integrative Medicine; Acupuncture for Chronic Illness; The Stram Center 2024 [www.stramcenter.com]
- Fan YA et al; Acupuncture's Role in Solving the Opioid Epidemic: Evidence, Cost-Effectiveness, and Care Availability for Acupuncture as a Primary, Non-Pharmacologic Method for Pain Relief and Management—White Paper 2017; *Journal of Integrative Medicine* Volume 15, Issue 6, November 2017, Pages 411-425
- Urits I et al; A Comprehensive Review of Alternative Therapies for the Management of Chronic Pain Patients: Acupuncture, Tai Chi, Osteopathic Manipulative Medicine, and Chiropractic Care; *Adv Ther.* 2021; 38(1): 76–89. doi: 10.1007/s12325-020-01554-0
- Paterson C, Britten N; Acupuncture for People with Chronic Illness: Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Outcome Assessment; *THE JOURNAL OF ALTERNATIVE AND COMPLEMENTARY MEDICINE*; Volume 9, Number 5, 2003, pp. 671–681 © Mary Ann Liebert, Inc.
- Sun Y et al; Efficacy of Acupuncture for Chronic Prostatitis/Chronic Pelvic Pain Syndrome: A Randomized Trial; *Annals of Internal Medicine* Volume 174, Number 10 <https://doi.org/10.7326/M21-1814>
- MacPherson H et al; Characteristics of acupuncture treatment associated with outcome: an individual patient meta-analysis of 17,922 patients with chronic pain in randomised controlled trials; *PLoS One.* 2013 Oct 11;8(10):e77438. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0077438. eCollection 2013.
- Zhu J, Arsovska B, Kozovska K; The impact and role of the Traditional Chinese Medicine on human health; *IOSR Journal of Dental and Medical Sciences (IOSR-JDMS)* e-ISSN: 2279-0853, p-ISSN: 2279-0861. Volume 17, Issue 10 Ver. 7 (October. 2018), PP 80-82