

An Auckland-based student acupuncture clinic patient profile and utilisation study

There has been an ongoing increase both internationally and nationally in the number of people who are seeking complementary and alternative medicine (CAM).¹⁻⁵ A number of studies have examined both attitudes toward CAM, as well as prevalence rates of CAM use in New Zealand.³⁻⁷ According to both international and national data, acupuncture is one of the more widely recognised and utilised CAM treatments.^{1-3,5,6,8,9}

At present, there are only two private training establishments in New Zealand that provide a degree qualification majoring in acupuncture based on traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). We were interested in identifying the characteristics of patients who visit a Chinese Medicine Student Acupuncture Clinic in the country's largest city, Auckland.

The aim of this study was to:

- Provide a demographic profile of current patients who attend a Chinese Medicine Student Acupuncture Clinic; and
- Identify the complaints for which patients sought treatment, and whether they had previously consulted another healthcare practitioner regarding their complaint.

During the 4-month data collection period, 229 new patients attended the Clinic, and consent was obtained from 206 patients. Eighty-three males and 123 females ranging from 8 years to 88 years of age (mean age = 44.7 years, standard deviation = 18.4 years) took part in the present study. Data were collected from two questionnaires and were analysed using descriptive statistics, carried out in SPSS (version 20.0) software.

The majority of patients who attended the Clinic were female (60%) and were aged between 30–49 years of age (34%) [Table 1].

Table 1. Patient demographic information

Variables	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	83	40
Female	123	60
Age (years)		
0–9	1	1
10–17	4	2
18–29	50	24
30–49	71	34
50–64	45	22
65–74	20	10
75 and older	15	7

The majority of patients who sought treatment at the clinic were Chinese (19%) followed by those who identified as being New Zealand European (17%); followed by a number of Asian subgroups and Pacific Island ethnic groups and those who identified as being Māori [Table 2].

Table 2. Patient ethnicity

Ethnicity	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Chinese	40	19
New Zealand European	36	17
Korean	16	7
Taiwanese	11	5
Indian	10	5
Pacific Persons	7	4
Māori	3	2
Other	26	14
Not disclosed	57	27

Note: Other refers to patients who identified as being from ethnic groups that comprised less than 5%.

Patients most commonly sought treatment for lower limb (18%), head and neck (16%) and upper limb complaints (14%) and for back pain (14%) [Table 3].

Table 3. Patients sought treatment for...

Variables	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Lower limb	36	18
Head and neck	33	16
Back pain	29	14
Upper limb	29	14
Mood, psychological and fatigue	15	8
Gynaecology and reproductive	12	5
Insomnia	11	4
Gastrointestinal and abdominal	10	4
Acne and skin	7	3
Other	15	10
Not stated	9	4

Note: Other refers to conditions that comprised less than 2%.

Forty-four percent of patients reported that they previously consulted another healthcare practitioner regarding their present complaint [Table 4].

Table 4. Other consultation

Other consultation	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Yes	91	44
No	78	38
Not stated	37	18

The majority of those patients who had consulted another healthcare practitioner for their complaint had been to see a general practitioner (20%) [Table 5].

Table 5. Type of healthcare professional seen in other consultation

Healthcare professional	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
General practitioner	41	20
Medical specialist	9	4
Physiotherapist	7	3
Other healthcare practitioner	19	11
Not applicable	79	38
Not disclosed	51	24

Note: Other refers to consulting a healthcare practitioner that comprised less than 2%.

Patients who attended the Clinic were more likely to be female, and younger or middle-aged; a finding similar to a number of previous studies.^{6,7,9} Disregarding incomplete ethnicity data, an almost equal proportion of patients who disclosed their ethnicity identified as being either Chinese or New Zealand European. This finding is similar to earlier studies, which reported higher CAM utilisation rates among New Zealand Europeans compared to other ethnic groups who reside in New Zealand.^{6,7}

While Europeans comprise the majority of the New Zealand population (74%) and those who identify as being Asian comprise only 12% of the national population, it may be concluded that a higher proportion of Asian patients are more likely to attend the Clinic, as it is a Traditional Chinese Medicine Clinic.¹⁰

Research indicates that some Asian sub-groups view Chinese and Western medicine to be complementary to one another.⁹ Seven percent of patients identified as being from a Pacific Island ethnic group, while 2% of patients identified as being Māori.

Acupuncture was utilised more for pain management for complaints related to either the lower limb or the upper limb, head and neck area, and for back pain. Almost one-half of patients reported consulting another healthcare practitioner (predominately a general practitioner) regarding their complaint prior to attending the clinic.

Previous studies have reported that individuals tend to seek CAM treatment for conditions that are difficult to treat or manage by conventional Western medicine.^{6,8}

Future research in this area will focus on identifying the reasons why patients attend such a clinic, and their views and experiences of acupuncture treatment.

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