

Inclusion of acupuncture in palliative care practice – benefits analysis

Tianshu (Susan) Wang, Aleksandar Zivaljevic

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Definition of palliative care and significance

- Palliative care is about improving quality of life for patients with advanced illness and their families
- The outcomes of palliative care treatments are grouped around prevention and relief of suffering, achieved by means of early identification, assessment and treatment of pain and other physical, psychosocial and spiritual distress.
- Globally, WHO estimated that in 2011, only 1 in 10 people in need received palliative care, almost 80% of palliative care is provided in high-income countries. Only 20 countries have palliative care well integrated into their health-care systems.

Cost of palliative care

- A dimension of palliative care that affects its comprehensiveness and its quality is the cost. The cost is one of the key points for money decisions in palliative care.
- End-of-life care is known to be expensive. The data shows that up to 12% of all healthcare spending is on end-of-life care (Raphael, Ahrens, & Fowler, 2001). In New Zealand, one of the 20 District Health Boards reported the cost to be just over NZ\$22,000 per person (New Zealand Medical Academy, 2011).

Indications on how acupuncture can contribute to palliative care

- Chinese medicine considers the whole picture of the patient, it guides patient to balance and regulate their body, to achieve a healthy mind and life style, it is not ignoring the illness, there is a hope that things can turn.
- Numerous studies report the effectiveness of acupuncture in its numerous applications.
- Dean-Clower et al. (2010) reported immediate self-reported improvement post-acupuncture treatment. The conditions treated were anxiety, fatigue, pain and depression. Life satisfaction and mood states were shown to improve and the improvements showed sustained benefit at 12 weeks.
- Benefits were also reported for other cancer-related symptoms, including fatigue, hot flushes, xerostomia, dyspnoea and anxiety.
- Reducing chemotherapy-or radiotherapy-induced side effects and cancer pain.

Pain and nausea management

- Pain is known to be one of the most important factors in patients' perception of quality of end-of-life care and any improvement in pain management can significantly improve total quality of care to this group of patients .
- Majority of studies focused on the treatment of pain and nausea using acupuncture.
- The effectiveness of acupuncture reduces the amount of drugs needed, decreases occurrence of adverse reactions to drugs, and lowers the cost in medical care

Limitations of research studies

- Despite of acupuncture's widespread acceptance, the evidence in support of the use of acupuncture in palliative care was considered either insufficient or of low quality in conventional medicine environment, which requires randomized controlled trials, a standardized approach to treatment needed
- TCM emphasis on holistic individuality and the acupuncture treatments is unique and complex for each individual, it is commonly cited as the reason why so few randomized controlled trials
- Suggest that future studies should put more emphasis on quality control and that characteristics of any study that can contribute to its trustworthiness, are given more planning and consideration.
- Calling for new strategy to evaluate the effect of TCM. It is important to incorporate the concepts of both Western medicine and TCM into research protocols.

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