

Quality of life of breast cancer patients medicated with anti-estrogens, 2 years after acupuncture treatment: a qualitative study.

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#### Abstract

**OBJECTIVE:** The aim of this study was to examine the quality of life of breast cancer patients medicated with estrogen antagonists, 2 years after having acupuncture treatment for hot flashes.

**METHODS AND MATERIALS:** Our sample was taken from women who had recently participated in a randomized controlled trial investigating the effects of acupuncture on hot flashes, a side effect of estrogen-antagonist treatment. Forty-one women from the true acupuncture treatment group and 41 women from the control group (sham acupuncture), who had 2 years previously received a course of 15 acupuncture treatments over a period of 10 weeks, were asked to answer an open question. The question, "Would you like to share your thoughts and experiences related to your breast cancer diagnosis, treatments or anything else?" was by being open, broad, and nonspecific, intended to stimulate subjective information, which was not included in the original, or future quantitative studies. Qualitative data were analyzed using systematic text condensation.

**RESULTS:** Most women were troubled by two or more side effects due to anti-estrogen medication, negatively affecting their life quality. Symptoms included hot flashes, sleep problems, muscle and joint pain, arm edema, fatigue, weight gain, depression, and lack of sexual desire. Women previously treated with sham acupuncture complained that hot flashes were still problematic, whilst those previously treated with traditional Chinese acupuncture found them less of a problem and generally had a more positive outlook on life. These results compare favorably with the findings from our original study that measured quantitatively health related quality of life.

**CONCLUSION:** Side effects due to anti-estrogen treatment seriously affect the quality of life of breast cancer operated patients. Patients who had previously been treated with traditional Chinese acupuncture complained less of hot flashes, and had a more positive outlook on life, than women who had previously been treated with sham acupuncture.