

Acupuncture in Patients Suffering from Allergic Asthma: Is It Worth Additional Costs?

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Abstract

Abstract Objectives: Acupuncture is increasingly used in patients with allergic asthma, but there is a lack of evidence on the cost-benefit relationship of this treatment. The aim of this study was to assess economic aspects of additional acupuncture treatment in patients with allergic bronchial asthma compared to patients receiving routine care alone. **Design, subjects, intervention, outcome measures:** In a randomized controlled trial, patients with allergic bronchial asthma were either allocated to a group receiving acupuncture immediately or a waiting-list control group. Both groups were free to use routine care treatment. The resource consumption, costs, and health-related quality of life were evaluated at baseline, and after 3 and 6 months by using statutory health insurance information and standardized questionnaires. **Main economic outcome parameters** were direct and indirect cost differences during the study period and the incremental cost-effectiveness ratio (ICER) of acupuncture treatment. **Results:** Three hundred and six (306) patients (159 acupuncture; 147 controls) were included (mean age 46.5±13.11 years, female 57.2%) and were comparable at baseline. Acupuncture treatment was associated with significantly higher costs compared to control patients (overall costs: €860.76 [95% confidence interval (CI) 705.04-1016.47] versus €518.80 [95% CI 356.66-680.93]; p=0.003; asthma-related costs: €517.52 [95% CI 485.63-549.40] versus €144.87 [95% CI 111.70-178.05]; p<0.001). These additional costs seem essentially driven by acupuncture costs themselves (€378.40 [95% CI 367.10-389.69]). However, acupuncture was associated with superior effectiveness in terms of quality-adjusted life years (QALYs). Resulting ICER lay between €23,231 (overall) and €25,315 (diagnosis-specific) per additional QALY. When using German acupuncture prices of year 2012, the ICER would improve to €12,810 (overall) versus €14,911 (diagnosis-specific) per QALY gained. **Conclusions:** Treating patients who have allergic bronchial asthma with acupuncture in addition to routine care resulted in additional costs and better effects in terms of patients' quality of life. Acupuncture therefore seems to be a useful and cost-effective add-on treatment.

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