

Effectiveness and acceptance of acupuncture in patients with chronic low back pain: results of a prospective, randomized, controlled trial.

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Abstract

OBJECTIVE:

To investigate the effectiveness of additional acupuncture in patients with chronic low back pain participating in an inpatient rehabilitation program.

DESIGN:

Patients were randomly assigned to one of two groups (A and B), both receiving a standard rehabilitation program according to German guidelines. Patients in group A additionally underwent acupuncture twice weekly, conducted by two Chinese physicians with education in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). At the beginning and end of the program, as well as at 3 months after, patients completed questionnaires about health-related quality of life (Short-Form 36 Health Survey [SF-36]), sociodemographic and clinical data, attitude towards TCM, pain, and adverse events. Setting: Inpatient rehabilitation clinic in Germany.

PATIENTS:

Patients with chronic low back pain participating in an inpatient rehabilitation program.

OUTCOME MEASURES:

Acceptance of acupuncture, health-related quality of life, and pain/symptoms.

RESULTS:

One hundred and forty-three patients were analyzed: 74 in group A (intervention) and 69 in group B (controls); 67% were men and 33% were women, with a mean age of 50.7 years. Acceptance of TCM was excellent: 89% of the patients would want TCM to be integrated into standard inpatient rehabilitation, and 83% would even have paid for TCM if necessary. Responses to SF-36 questionnaires showed that group A reported significantly better physical functioning, general health, vitality, and emotional role than group B. Pain outcomes in group A were superior to those in group B. Specifically, pain with sitting/standing, pain upon carrying loads of 10 kg or more, and prickling in hands and feet were significantly diminished.

CONCLUSION:

Acupuncture was highly accepted and had positive effects in patients with chronic low back pain. These results show that acupuncture can be an effective, well-tolerated therapy with no major adverse events.

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