

- Title** Acupuncture As A Complementary Therapy For Musculoskeletal Pain
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Aim

To review evidence on the effectiveness, safety and cost-effectiveness of acupuncture as a complementary therapy for musculoskeletal pain.

Conclusions and results

There was evidence on the effectiveness of acupuncture for patients with musculoskeletal pain such as neck pain, osteoarthritis, back pain, low back pain, fibromyalgia, and ankle sprain. Although pain due to insertion of the needle, ecchymosis and local paresthesia were among some of adverse events reported but there was evidence to suggest that acupuncture was safe and there was no serious adverse event noted. However, the systematic reviews retrieved included studies which have various biases and hence varying the quality of included studies. Furthermore, based on one economic evaluation study conducted in primary care setting, a short course of traditional acupuncture for persistent non-specific low back pain in primary care confers a modest health benefit for minor extra cost to the NHS compared with usual care. However, acupuncture care for low back pain seems to be cost-effective in the longer term. The overall incremental cost-effectiveness ratio (ICER) for acupuncture in the treatment of low back pain was positive with a mean of £4241 at 24 month with QALY gain of 0.027. In Malaysia, it is estimated that the cost for one session acupuncture treatment for chronic pain management is around RM50 /session.

Recommendations (if any)

Based on the review, acupuncture has the potential to be used as a complementary therapy for musculoskeletal pain (such as neck pain, ankle sprain, fibromyalgia, back pain and osteoarthritis). However, patients should be referred by clinicians after exclusion of other pathologies and the acupuncture should be conducted by trained personnel.

Methods

Literatures were searched through electronic databases specifically PubMed, Medline, Cochrane, Ovid, Horizon scanning databases, other websites and from non-scientific database - Google search engine. In addition, a cross-referencing of the articles retrieved was also carried out accordingly to the topic. Relevant articles were critically appraised and evidence graded using US/Canadian Preventive Services Task Force.

Further research/reviews required

Although acupuncture has the potential to be used as a complementary therapy for musculoskeletal pain for certain diseases, the use of acupuncture must be monitored and the procedure must be conducted by a qualified person and must be referred by clinicians after all of other pathologies already excluded. Research is warranted to provide high quality scientific evidence and less bias to support the use of acupuncture in musculoskeletal pain patient and all the evidence needs to be updated from time to time to improve clinical outcomes.

Written by

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