

Acupuncture, Counselling and Usual Care for Depression (ACUDep Trial): findings for effectiveness and cost-effectiveness

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Background: Evidence regarding the use of acupuncture for depression is limited. This randomised controlled trial aimed to evaluate the clinical and cost effectiveness of acupuncture for managing depression, in comparison with counselling and usual care alone. **Methods:** 755 patients with moderate to severe depression were enrolled into the study from UK medical practices, which exceeded the recruitment target by 18%. Participants were randomised to receive either: twelve sessions of acupuncture plus usual care (n=302); twelve sessions of counselling plus usual care (n = 302); or usual care alone (n=151). Analysis was by intention to treat. **Results:** Participants in the acupuncture arm attended ten sessions on average, compared with nine sessions for those allocated to counselling. Results for the primary outcome measure, the Patient Health Questionnaire at 3 months, showed that acupuncture was more effective than usual care (-2.46, 95% CI -3.72 to -1.21) for alleviating depression, and that the magnitude of this effect was similar to, if not slightly greater than, that of counselling (-1.73, 95%CI: -3.00 to -0.45). Compared with usual care, acupuncture cost £3,417 per quality adjusted life year (QALY), and counselling cost £5,412/QALY. **Conclusions:** Both acupuncture and counselling represent clinically effective treatment options for managing depression, although acupuncture was found to be more cost-effective.

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Key words: Acupuncture, counselling, depression, randomised controlled trial.

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