In the UK, it has been estimated that each week, about one in 10 GPs either refer patients to have acupuncture for their problems or practise it themselves.
“Instead of treating pain, acupuncture is most popular among patients with neurological conditions in China ...”

Similar pragmatic RCTs that evaluate the effectiveness of acupuncture in treating other common ‘difficult to treat’ conditions in primary care should be encouraged, as although there is good evidence of the efficacy of using acupuncture in improving pain-related clinical conditions, the evidence for the use of acupuncture in other common conditions, such as medically unexplained symptoms, is weaker. Despite its popularity, recent meta-analyses from the Cochrane Collaboration have found that there was insufficient evidence to recommend acupuncture for a number of common conditions in primary care including depression. In these areas, the authors of the Cochrane article suggested that more trials of higher quality are needed.

Another strength of the reported trial is the inclusion of the nested qualitative study in its design. This component of the study is important because knowing the ‘why’ and ‘how’ patients benefit from acupuncture can help healthcare providers identify the types of patients who may find acupuncture most acceptable. Moreover, understanding patients’ experiences of acupuncture can shed light on potential psychosocial factors that can contribute to the effectiveness of acupuncture.

Few studies have evaluated the cost effectiveness of acupuncture. This area of research is particularly important because, as with the aging population and an increasing prevalence of chronic conditions, most health systems are seeking ways to provide more cost-effective healthcare services. Thus, findings from cost-effectiveness studies can provide healthcare policy makers with information that can help them to make better decisions about which interventions should be supported in an environment with limited resources. This is especially important if alternative or complementary therapies are to be integrated into mainstream medical care.

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