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Bibliographic review of knee pain treated with acupuncture

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Background: Knee pathologies especially osteoarthritis is a very common and disabling condition specially in people over 50 years of age. First line treatments are NSAIDs, which has a lot of secondary effects, because of that non invasive treatments are being used as physiotherapy and acupuncture among others, but can we trust them?

Method: Systematic search in the main data base. We reviewed articles and clinical trials about knee pain treatment with acupuncture, focusing on the method followed, the use of placebo/sham acupuncture/other treatments and the results

Results: Acupuncture has shown in several trials an improvement of the functional limitation and the pain comparing to placebo. There are controversial results if we compare acupuncture and “sham” acupuncture, although both had better results than placebo. Despite all the evidences, it is a confusing factor and a discussion topic the method called “sham acupuncture”. This technique is sometimes a confusion factor in studies because it is not always the same method. In some studies when they use this term when they puncture in an area closet o the acupuncture point, puncture in the acupuncture pint but without stimulation, or sometimes puncture outside the channels. It is not the same so it is difficult to compare and sometimes this method produce effects itself. Trial like Scharf, compares the use of physiotherapy and acupuncture to placebo and acupuncture. The conclusion it reaches is that the difference is not significant in function or pain release. This seems to show that physiotherapy acts in a similar way that acupuncture does, so it should be used in trial simultaneously.

Conclusion: There is sufficient evidence for acupuncture to be considered as an option for treatment of chronic knee pain. Acupuncture is likely to provide a replacement for NSAIDs, being at least equally effective probably more cost effective and much safer.