



British
Acupuncture
Council

Acupuncture

An evidence-based healthcare solution

The NHS in the UK faces problems with a severe shortage of qualified healthcare workers, misuse of prescription opioids and many patients with multiple long-term conditions taking multiple medications.¹⁻³

Integration of acupuncture into the NHS would be a step towards solving these problems. Acupuncture has been practised for 2,000 years and recently its effectiveness has been confirmed in clinical trials, which have shown that it is more than just a placebo.^{4,5}

Studies show acupuncture is effective and safe, both when used alone and alongside medication.⁶ Acupuncture works for specific illnesses but also bolsters overall health and wellbeing, something that the NHS would like to achieve but doesn't yet have the tools, the skills or the attitudes to do well.

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There is substantial evidence supporting acupuncture's effectiveness, compared to conventional treatments, for addressing various conditions⁷

Across the world, acupuncture is used in hospital emergency departments, in cancer centres, and in midwifery as well as in primary care. In the UK, the Gateway clinic was fully integrated into the NHS in 1992, and treats about 300 patients every week. GPs from Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham can freely refer their patients with long-term chronic pain, migraine, cancer pain, fibromyalgia and HIV.

"We are lucky to work in a NHS Trust that recognises this little jewel they have in the community, and the NHS should be proud too."

Dominique Joire

Clinical Head of Service



“ ”

I would consider the acupuncture treatment I received to be the most effective of every treatment option I've ever tried in my life at reducing my pain and increasing my quality of life, as well as the quickest in producing results. I was able to stop taking all my pain medications while receiving acupuncture and was even able to try a few physical activities (such as yoga) that have caused me pain in the past. I only wish I could continue to receive acupuncture as I believe it's the one treatment with results that would allow me to work full time⁴⁵

Acupuncture can be cost-saving

Acupuncture is cost-effective for the treatment of many common health conditions, including the management of chronic pain.⁸⁻¹¹ Studies show that in migraine or headache, the cost-effectiveness for acupuncture is well within the threshold used by NICE.²⁸⁻³¹

Patients with migraine or headache who received acupuncture had, compared with controls:³¹



For long-term low back pain, acupuncture is more cost-effective than NSAIDs²³ and it can stay cost-effective for two years after treatment.^{19,22}

Not only is its cost-effectiveness for osteoarthritis of the knee or hip³⁹⁻⁴² but also it has the potential to delay or avoid knee replacement surgery and hence be cost-saving.⁴²

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When acupuncture was offered to patients with knee osteoarthritis who were to be referred for orthopaedic surgery, a third were able to avoid surgery with a cost-saving of £100,000 per year⁴²

Effective for long-term pain

There is a large body of evidence that acupuncture can treat long-term pain.^{5,8,9}

Acupuncture could be a key part of the solution to the over-prescription of opioids for chronic pain, which is linked to poor pain control, side effects and a risk of addiction.¹⁶

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Acupuncture seems, in skilled hands, one of the safer forms of medical intervention¹⁵

Acupuncture is effective for conditions that don't respond well to medication, such as migraine, back pain and knee osteoarthritis.

- Acupuncture for low back pain helps pain and improves function without any serious side effects¹⁷⁻²¹
- Acupuncture is as good at preventing migraine as medication,^{4,24-27} and is better at reducing pain levels and the number of migraines experienced. There are fewer side effects with acupuncture than medication²⁷
- Acupuncture treats the pain of knee osteoarthritis, helps mobility and has similar levels of side effects to ibuprofen and glucosamine sulfate³²⁻³⁸
- Acupuncture can address not just the pain but also the distress that often accompanies it. It is a whole person treatment

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Acupuncture has emerged as a powerful, evidence-based, safe, cost-effective, and available treatment⁸

The future of acupuncture in the UK

- Acupuncture can be easily integrated into the NHS to improve patient care⁸
- As it is not protected by statute in the UK, anyone can practise without training. The British Acupuncture Council works to ensure the authenticity, safety and efficacy of acupuncture provision in the UK⁴³
- The British Acupuncture Council is the only acupuncture organisation in the UK to be registered with the Professional Standards Authority. GPs can refer patients to our members under GMC guidelines⁴⁴
- With almost 3,000 members, the British Acupuncture Council has a ready workforce of acupuncturists trained to the highest standards in the world

To find out more contact us at:
info@acupuncture.org.uk

Notes

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