

Acupuncture, its place in nursing: safety and side effects of acupuncture therapy in Australia

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ABSTRACT

Introduction

The tremendous popularity of acupuncture in Australia demands continual safety assessment. This review aimed to determine the characteristics of acupuncture related adverse events, analyse their possible causes, and inform future research and practice.

Methods

Across 8 databases, all types of clinical trials, surveys, and case reports from 2012 to 2018 reporting adverse events associated with the use of acupuncture in Australia on human subjects were systematically reviewed. Types of acupuncture including manual acupuncture, electro acupuncture and laser acupuncture. Incidence and form of acupuncture related adverse events were the key outcomes of this study. In addition, the quality of adverse events reporting and the likelihood of causality were examined by two reviewers and checked by two experts specialised in acupuncture.

Results

The 17 analysed studies encompassed ten randomised controlled trials, two nonrandomised controlled trials, three uncontrolled clinical trials, and two case reports, with a total of 1160 participants receiving true acupuncture. Feelings of dizziness, fatigue and nausea were the most common adverse events identified in our review across all acupuncture modalities.

Conclusions

Acupuncture is generally a safe modality and serious adverse events after treatment are uncommon when supported with well-established guidelines and practiced by licensed, qualified practitioners.

Keywords: acupuncture; adverse event; side effect; adverse effect; safety; risk; systematic review