

Conclusion

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Acupuncture versus Analgesics for the Treatment of Migraines 2/16

Acupuncture versus Analgesics for the Treatment of Migraines Migraine is a common disorder which exists worldwide. Over the years it has become even more common in women of various ages. The onset of migraine not only affects the lives of the ones suffering from it, but also the lives of those around them (Rutberg & Öhrling, 2009). The onset of migraine is very unpredictable. Patients can have migraine episodes as frequently as daily or as seldom as once a month. Migraine is mostly accompanied by nausea and vomiting. It is very important for a migraine to be diagnosed correctly, as these headaches can go undiagnosed for long periods of time; thereby resulting in extreme headaches (Iseri & Cabioglu, 2012).

Migraine has various negative effects on the lives of the patients suffering from it. After depressive disorders, migraine is the main reason why women take days off work, in high-income countries. Not only does it affect working women, but the onset of migraine in adolescents is also very common (Iseri & Cabioglu, 2012). Migraine patients often feel that the headaches control their lives. Research has proven that patients think that migraine affects their quality of life and at times makes it impossible for them to live their life freely. However, it is one of those disorders, the effects of which, extend to the entire family, friends and other relationships (Rutberg & Öhrling, 2009). Even though there have been various interventions and research studies regarding migraines, it has been very difficult for the nurses to help migraine patients deal with the symptoms. Both pharmacological and non-pharmacological treatments have been used to treat migraines in women. Acupuncture is a non-pharmacological treatment that has been found to be

very effective when treating migraine headaches. Numerous research studies have been conducted over time to test the effectiveness of acupuncture for curing migraine (Iseri & Cabioglu, 2012). The objective of this paper is to review and analyze the effectiveness of acupuncture against migraine in females. The paper investigates how acupuncture is more effective, and determine the veracity of it exhibiting fewer side effects, than analgesics for alleviation of migraine, in females between 25 to 55 years old, during the first few hours of administration. Therefore, the clinical question of interest is: from among female patients between the ages of 25 through 55 that had been diagnosed with migraine, is acupuncture more effective as it allegedly exhibit lesser side effects than analgesics, for alleviating the symptoms?

Acupuncture as Medicinal Therapy

Acupuncture is a Chinese form of medicinal therapy, which is administered by the insertion of needles at specific points in the body. Treatments like acupuncture were traditionally used by the Chinese to cure an apparent deterioration of health, which they believed was primarily caused by an imbalance in the Yin and Yang. Yin and Yang are the underlying conceptual framework of Chinese medicine which contents that good health comes from a balance of Yin which allegedly exhibits negative, dark, and feminine features, and contrasted with the Yang which manifests positive, bright, and masculine facets.

For nurses who are giving the acupuncture, it is very important for them to diagnose what the actual ailment is. In addition to this, they should also be well aware about the various techniques of administering the acupuncture.

Traditionally, different techniques are used to heal different symptoms in a human body. For example, the shiatsu technique is used as a tonification technique which helps in alleviating cold or certain deficiencies. For nurses, it is very important to learn the various techniques so that when they are administering acupuncture to their patients, they can easily use the technique which corresponds to their particular illness (Beal, 2000).

Effectiveness of Acupuncture Treatment

The research studies which have been used were not all performed on females. Rutberg & Öhrling (2009) were the ones who tested the effectiveness of acupuncture on a sample which comprised entirely of females. The study does not only focus on the after effects of acupuncture but the experiences of the patients during and after the treatments. As opposed to this, Iseri & Cabioğlu (2012), investigated the mechanism of how acupuncture leads to pain alleviation. Iseri & Cabioğlu (2012) continued to draw on results from various other research studies, which were previously conducted on the same topic, to arrive at the conclusion that the effects of acupuncture are not only psychological. There are scientific mechanisms associated with this form of treatment which help reduce the pain in the human body. The resultant reduction in pain is an amalgamation of the psychological and the biological effect on the human body. Streng et al. (2006) investigated how effective acupuncture is in treating migraine as opposed to using drugs like metoprolol. The research was performed on both men and women. The study concluded that indeed acupuncture was very effective when it came to treating migraines. Whether it was more effective than the drug metoprolol was still to be investigated.

Numerous preliminary studies have been carried out to test the effectiveness of acupuncture. All of the researchers yielded that acupuncture is indeed very effective when it came to treating migraines. There are certain techniques associated with the procedure. The nurses who are performing the procedure of acupuncture need to be very careful about these techniques. Different techniques are used to cure different ailments in the human body.

During the first few hours of administration, acupuncture is indeed very effective in treating migraines, especially in females. Even though the onset of side effects is very high in females, resorting to acupuncture reduces the dependency on pharmacological drugs. Most migraine patients refrain from taking the drugs daily which is one of the main reasons why their migraine accelerates and eventually becomes a chronic daily migraine. Patients regard acupuncture as a natural treatment, thus are more open to this procedure. Unlike various drugs, this procedure does not have to be performed daily, which is why it is widely accepted by the patients.

Acupuncture Treatment and Migraines

In order to check the effectiveness of acupuncture against migraine, various research studies have been carried out using a female population as a sample. During the acupuncture treatment, numerous women felt pain in various parts of their bodies when the needles were inserted. According to these women, some acupuncture points proved to be more painful than the others. Most of the respondents admitted that their migraine was relieved as a result of the acupuncture treatment. Many respondents also said that the behaviour exhibited by their nurse affected their level of pain as well. When

the nurse was calm, the women felt less discomfort and pain during the process of the needle insertion (Rutberg & Öhrling, 2009).

However, the effectiveness of acupuncture to cure a migraine is not because of the fact that it is psychological. There is a scientific mechanism which leads to the alleviation of the migraine in patients following an acupuncture session. When needles are inserted into the skin, pain signals are transmitted from the spinal cord to the thalamus and the sensory cortex in the brain. This activates the pain control mechanisms and stimulates the periventricular cortical neurons. From these neurons the signals are transmitted to the enkephalinergic neurons, which are in direct contact with the hypothalamus and the cerebral cortex. This stimulates the hypothalamic neurons to secrete endorphins into the synaptic cleft. When a needle is inserted into the acupuncture point, the stimuli reach the cortex and stimulate the pain control mechanism. Once the pain control mechanism is activated it increases the level of beta endorphin, serotonin, norepinephrine and enkephalin levels in the brain and plasma. Together these chemicals create an analgesic effect in the body, thereby reducing the migraine pain. The acupuncture points chosen to cure migraine were: V1 dermatome, V2 dermatome and C2 dermatome. Repeated acupuncture treatments, which focused on the above mentioned acupuncture points, did result in less amount of migraine pain in patients (Iseri & Cabioğlu, 2012).

Even though there is scientific proof as to how acupuncture reduces pain in the body, many times, during research, patients feel much better after an acupuncture session. It was also found that such satisfaction was only found in patients who were pro acupuncture. For those who were sceptical about

the treatment method, acupuncture did not bring about the desired results. Thus it can be said that the effectiveness of the treatment depend on the psychology of the patient as well, in addition to the chemical effect on the body (Streng & Linde, 2006).

In all of the research studies conducted, it was found out that acupuncture was effective in alleviating migraine as compared to pharmacological medicine. According to Iseri & Cabioğlu (2012), repeated acupuncture sessions were more effective in treating migraine as opposed to topiramate, an orally administered prophylactic drug. Similarly, Rutberg & Öhrling (2009) found that treating migraine by acupuncture not only reduced the intensity but also the frequency of the attacks. Women perceived acupuncture as being natural and thus, valued the reduction in the use of drugs to treat migraine headaches. It was also found that the daily usage of drugs was one of the reasons why many people have chronic daily migraine. These people thus perceive acupuncture as a welcome change in their lives (Rutberg & Öhrling, 2009).

Adverse Effects of Acupuncture Treatment

Even though acupuncture is a natural way of treating migraines, it does not mean that there are no adverse side effects associated with this treatment. Park et al. (2010) investigated the adverse effects of the acupuncture procedure on patients. It was observed that from the entire sample that was used for the research, the occurrence of an adverse event was about 3.2%. Out of the patients who encountered an adverse effect, 73% were females where as only 27% were males. The most common complaint of the patients was that of pain, specifically pain in the lower back. Patients did experience

pain in their shoulders, knees and limbs but the most common was lower back pain.

Apart from the common complaint of pain, the most common adverse side effect which was observed was that of haemorrhage. It was experienced by 32% of the patients who experienced any side effect. The occurrence of haemorrhages was high in patients but all of the haemorrhages vanished within a day and no incidents of recurrence were reported.

Followed by the onset of haemorrhages, the second most common side effect which was observed was the formation of hematoma. Hematoma was found in 28% of the patients who experienced side effects of the treatments. To test the extent to which acupuncture affected hematoma, the procedure was stopped in half of the affected patients and continued for the other half. In most of the patients, the hematoma disappeared after sometime, irrespective of the fact that whether the treatment was continued or not (Park et al., 2010).

Pain on the site of the needle insertion was also another commonly reported side effect. This was mostly associated with the way the nurse inserted the needle into the body of the patients. Mostly patients complained of pain when the needles were either inserted or withdrawn from the body. The nurses who carry out acupuncture procedures on patients, it is very important for them to be careful (Park et al., 2010). As mentioned before, the effectiveness of the procedure does depend to some degree on the psychological behaviour and thinking of the patient as well. Thus if the patient feels a lot of pain when the needles are inserted or withdrawn, automatically the patient will not be satisfied with the entire procedure.

During the course of the research, other side effects were noticed but their onset was not as common. The other side effects noticed were stuck/bent needles, cramps, aggravation of existing symptoms, temporary paresthesia, nausea, dizziness and skin infection. It was also observed in the research that most of the side effects occurred on the day the treatments were carried out. It was concluded that since a standardized procedure for acupuncture was used on all the subjects, the patient's sex and the method did not have any relation to the side effects. The side effects were brought on due to the difference in the experience of the oriental medicine doctors. Those doctors who had an experience of less than 3 years were the ones whose patients had a high incidence of the side effects of the treatment. Even though from the above stated observations it seems that the acupuncture treatment is potentially dangerous and has numerous side effects associated with it, this is not the case. The research was carried out on a small sample of people had certain reservations. On the whole the procedure of curing pain through acupuncture is safer than most analgesic pharmacological medicines. As long as the procedure is conducted by a certified doctor or nurse, there are very few risks attached to this form of treatment.

Just like any other medical procedure, there is a risk of the onset of side effects like haemorrhages, hematoma, dizziness, pain and nausea associated with this procedure. However, research has proven that the associated risk is extremely low. There are very few cases where the patients feel any extreme pain or experience any extreme side effects. If these side effects occur, they disappear within a day. Unlike other procedures and drugs, which

can give patients prolonged side effects, the side effects of acupuncture are very rare and short lived. If performed properly by certified nurses and doctors, acupuncture is a safer way of reducing pain, without any side effects, as compared to the other analgesics which are available for the treatment of migraine.

Conclusion

The current discourse aimed to seek a response to the clinical question, to wit: from among female patients between the ages of 25 through 55 that had been diagnosed with migraine, is acupuncture more effective as it allegedly exhibit lesser side effects than analgesics, for alleviating the symptoms? From various research studies that examined acupuncture as a medicinal therapy and evaluated its alleged effectiveness, there were numerable supports that viably established findings that acupuncture was more effective in treating migrane for the identified population due to its ability to relieve pain with lesser side effects. Likewise, since acupuncture, as an alternative treatment was noted to be administered only on stipulated time frames, depending on an initial assessment of the patient's health condition and level of pain, it was most preferred as compared to taking daily analgesics to relieve pain.

There are evident limitations, as noted from the researches, including its applicability for treating other illnesses, aside from migraine; and extending the sample participants to other age groups and gender. Likewise, future research on the subject could be recommended to focus on the need to determine the level of competencies for contemporary western nurses to administer acupuncture in various health care settings. In addition, it would

also be an interesting venture to delve into determining the perceptions of the general population on acupuncture, as an alternative method of healing for various illnesses, to establish their acceptance of this an effective method of healing.

Overall, the result of the current exploratory study confirmed that acupuncture is indeed a safer way of reducing pain, and evidently more effective as it was proven to provide relief without any side effects, as compared to the other analgesics prescribed to allegedly treat migraine. The crucial factor to consider is the healthcare practitioners' expertise and competencies to administer this kind of treatment to prepare them to address any complications that might possibly ensue.

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