

Acupuncture Reduces Pain Disability, Stress, and Depression in United States Military Veterans with Chronic Pain

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Abstract : The Washington, DC Veterans Affairs Medical Center (DC VAMC) offers complementary and integrative health (CIH) services such as acupuncture, yoga, meditation, and nutrition education through a coordinated outpatient clinic. The primary population utilizing CIH services are veterans with chronic pain. Acupuncture is one of the most popular of the CIH services available at the DC VAMC. As interest and availability grows, it is important to measure health outcomes associated with CIH service utilization. The purpose of this study was to investigate pain and mental health outcomes for veterans with chronic pain enrolled in individual acupuncture services in the DC VAMC. Veterans at the DC VAMC with self-identified chronic pain and no prior acupuncture experience were recruited for the study (n=70). Veterans were referred for services by a medical provider and completed baseline assessments at the program orientation prior to participating in any CIH services. Veterans received four individual, full-body acupuncture appointments within four weeks of study enrollment. After the first month, participants were scheduled for six appointments that occurred every two weeks and then eight more sessions that were scheduled one month apart. Follow-up assessments were administered at 2, 4, 6, 8, and 12 months. The findings reported will include completed time points at two and four months. Measures include a demographics survey, the Measure Yourself Medical Outcome Profile-2 (MYMOP-2), The Beck Depression Inventory (BDI-II), the Defense Veterans Pain Rating Scale (DVPRS), and the Pain Disability Questionnaire (PDQ). In this sample, 67% identified a pain condition as their primary health concern. Between baseline and two-month follow-up, there were significant improvements in participants' primary health concern (MYMOP-2 $p=0.010$), general wellbeing (MYMOP-2 $p=0.011$), and a significant decrease in the use of medication (MYMOP-2 $p<0.000$). Between 2 and 4-month follow-up, pain disability (PDQ $p=0.035$), pain rating (DVPRS $p=0.027$), and depression (BDI-II $p=0.003$) significantly improved. Preliminary findings indicate that individual acupuncture therapy can be effective at improving health outcomes, well-being, and decreasing medication use in U.S. military veterans with chronic pain. Findings also suggest that individual acupuncture therapy can improve pain ratings, pain disability, and depression in veterans with chronic pain.

Keywords : acupuncture, chronic pain, depression, integrative health, medication use, military, pain, veterans, wellbeing

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