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Research Article

ACUPUNCTURE TREATMENT IN OSTEOARTHRITIS

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ABSTRACT

Osteoarthritis is a chronic degenerative disease that affects the joints, characterized with bone hypertrophy, reduction of the joint space and formation of osteophytes. This leads to appearance of pain, swelling and stiffness of the affected joints, mostly in the morning and after resting. Most affected are the joints on the hands, spine, hips and knees. Osteoarthritis most commonly affects people above 60 and mostly women. Acupuncture can give immediate relief of the pain. During the acupuncture treatment are released endorphins (neurotransmitters), which have the same effect on the pain as when some very strong medications like codeine or morphine are used. In this research are included 30 patients, 14 male and 16 female, all treated with fire needle acupuncture on the affected joints with osteoarthritis. Patients were on age from 34 to 83. Patients were treated in a clinic for Traditional Chinese Medicine and acupuncture by a doctor specialist in acupuncture. In all patients were treated Ashi points i.e. the most painful points on the area of the affected joints. Most common age group was from 60 to 70. In most of the patents the condition was chronic. 15 patients were taking additional medication therapy. Most affected joints were the joints on the knee, spine, hands and feet. Most patients – 17 have done 1-5 treatments. The effect was achieved in all patients, with successful reduce of the pain, swelling, redness and stiffness in the affected joints and improving of the movement and the stability of the joints.

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INTRODUCTION

Osteoarthritis is a chronic degenerative disease that affects the joints, characterized with bone hypertrophy, reduction of the joint space and formation of osteophytes. This leads to appearance of pain, swelling and stiffness of the affected joints, mostly in the morning and after resting. Other symptoms that may appear are: reduced range of motion in the joints, redness of the skin around the joints, tenderness, bone growths, reduced flexibility and etc. Most affected are the joints on the hands, spine (neck), hips and knees.

Arthrosis is other commonly name used for osteoarthritis. Osteoarthritis most commonly affects people above 60 and mostly women. Risk factors are: genetics, obesity, older age, bone deformities, joint injuries, putting a lot of stress on the joints, infections and other. The diagnosis is made with blood test markers, joint aspiration, arthroscopy, MRI or X-rays.

The classical medicine treatment usually involves use of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), steroid injections, occupational therapy, physical therapy, wearing braces or splints, analgesics and joint replacement. [1] [2]

People with severe osteoarthritis have partial or complete loss of the cartilage in the joints. The cartilage is protective, flexible tissue of the bones and when it breaks down it causes the bones to rub, thus causing intensive pain, swelling and stiffness. Once damaged cartilage cannot be repaired because it doesn't contain any blood vessels. [3]

Many types of arthritis, including the osteoarthritis can be successfully treated with Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) with acupuncture, tuina massage, herbal medicine, and mind-body exercises. The treatment with TCM for every patient is individual and the patient is seen as a separate whole, because no two patients experience osteoarthritis the same. Two patients may experience the same symptoms but the root of the cause may be different. From TCM perspective, the osteoarthritis occurs as a cause of different imbalances in the body related to swelling and inflammation in the immune, metabolic and circulatory system. [4]

According to TCM, there are 4 types of osteoarthritis

1. Zuo Bi-The pain is worsened on damp days and afflicted joint feel numb and heavy.

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2. Re Bi-Swelling, sharp pain and tenderness is present in one or more joints.
3. Xing Bi - The pain is felt in more joints in the body (the pain wanders) in patients with weak constitution.
4. Tong Bi - Severe pain present in one or more joints. The pain is worsened by activity and cold and reduced with heat. [5]

Acupuncture can give immediate relief of the pain. During the acupuncture treatment are released endorphins (neurotransmitters), which have the same effect on the pain as when some very strong medications like codeine or morphine are used. [4]

MATERIAL AND METHODS

In this research are included 30 patients, 14 male and 16 female, all treated with fire needle acupuncture on the affected joints with osteoarthritis. The treated patients are on age from 34 to 83. The patients were treated in a clinic for Traditional Chinese Medicine and acupuncture in Skopje, Macedonia by a doctor specialist in acupuncture. In all patients were treated Ashi points i.e. the most painful points in the area of the affected joints. Treatments were made indoor, on a room temperature with duration of 5-10 minutes.

In the research were included patients treated in the clinic in a period of 10 years only for osteoarthritis, patients with osteoporosis, patients older than 60 years, patients who were taking medication therapy prescribed by doctor and physical therapy and patients with chronic and acute pain.

From the research were excluded patients who didn't finish the treatments, patients who dropped out of therapy, pregnant and breastfeeding women, children, mentally unstable patients and patients with weak constitution.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The treated patients were divided into 6 age groups. Most common age group is from 60 to 70 years of age (9 patients). The age groups and number of patients in each are shown on table 1.

Table 1 Age groups

Age group	Number of patients
30-40	2
40-50	4
50-60	8
60-70	9
70-80	6
>80	1

In most of the patents the condition was chronic. 16 of the patients said the pain was present for more than 1 year (in most patients more than 5 years) and in 8 patients the pain was present less than a year (for 2 or 3 months mostly). 15 patients were taking additional medication therapy. Medications that were taken are: Lanzul, Decortin, Ventor, Nalgesin, Movalis, Diclofenac and similar.

Two of the patients (women) reported having osteoporosis.

Most affected joints were the joints on the knee, spine, hands and feet. 11 patients reported having pain in the knees and spine, 7 had pain in the hands and legs, 2 patients had pain in the shoulders and 1 patient located pain in the hips.

Most common symptoms in the patients were: pain in the joints, tenderness, stiffness, instability of the joint, swelling, inflammation, tiredness, cramps, tingling sensations, movement difficulties and other. Most patients – 17 have done 1-5 treatments. The pain in most of the patients is released after only one fire-needle acupuncture treatment. Effect was achieved in all patients with certain number of treatments. On table 2 are shown the number of treatments made.

Table 2 Number of treatments made

Number of treatments	Number of patients
1-5	17
6-10	11
>10	2

The points that were used in the treatment are called Ashi points and were specifically chosen to help the patients to release the pain in the most affected areas. Ashi points are trigger points or most painful points on the affected places. Every point is treated separately and is needled very fast in and out 5-10 times with red heated acupuncture needle. After the needling a vacuum cup is put on the treated area for 5 minutes to collect the toxic blood that comes out of the needled points. With the fire needling technique the pain is in fact coming out of the body physically as a waste in a form of blood.

The external pathogenic factors wind, cold and dampness can attack the body and build up in the joints, muscles and tendons. These factors create obstruction in the meridians and cause pain, stiffness and other typical symptoms. If the factor heat is generated into those places, it is manifested as inflammation. Chronic obstruction from these factors can lead to formation of phlegm and thus cause deformation of the joints and bones. [6] The patients usually feel better after only one treatment, but in osteoarthritis usually takes more treatments so a prolonged relief of the pain can be produced.

With the acupuncture treatment the Blood and Qi flow along the meridians are moved and released from the blockages, the pain and disability are reduced, the joint function is improved and the whole well-being of the patient is enhanced. [5] [7]

CONCLUSION

The effect from the acupuncture treatment was achieved in all patients, with successful reduce of the pain, swelling, redness and stiffness in the affected joints and improving of the movement and the stability of the joints.

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