

Acupuncture or counselling plus usual care 'may improve' depression symptoms

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Acupuncture or counselling, provided alongside usual care, could benefit patients with depression, according to a study by researchers at the University of York.

The study, conducted by a team led by Dr Hugh MacPherson, of the Department of Health Sciences at York, found that in a primary care setting, combining acupuncture or counselling with usual care had some benefits after three months for patients with recurring depression.

Published this week in *PLOS Medicine*, the study, which also involved researchers from the Centre for Health Economics at York and Hull York Medical School, was funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Programme Grants for Applied Research Programme.

Many patients with depression are interested in receiving non-[drug therapies](#), however, there is limited evidence to support the use of acupuncture or counselling for depression in a primary care setting. In this pragmatic [randomised controlled trial](#) conducted in the North of England, the research team randomised patients with depression to receive 12 weekly sessions of acupuncture plus usual care (302 patients), or 12 weekly sessions of counselling plus usual care (302 patients), or usual care alone (151 patients).

Compared with usual care alone, there was a significant reduction in average depression scores at three months for both the acupuncture and counselling interventions, but there was no significant difference in depression scores between the acupuncture and counselling groups. At nine months and 12 months, because of improvements in the depression scores in the usual care group, acupuncture and counselling were no longer better than usual care.

Dr MacPherson says: "Although these findings are encouraging, our study does not identify which

aspects of acupuncture and counselling are likely to be most beneficial to patients, nor does it provide information about the effectiveness of acupuncture or counselling, compared with usual care, for patients with [mild depression](#).

"To our knowledge, our study is the first to rigorously evaluate the clinical and economic impact of acupuncture and counselling for patients in primary care who are representative of those who continue to experience depression in primary care."

He adds: "We have provided evidence that [acupuncture](#) versus usual care and counselling versus usual care are both associated with a significant reduction in symptoms of depression in the short to medium term, and are not associated with serious adverse events."

The article is titled 'Acupuncture and Counselling for Depression in Primary Care: A Randomised Controlled Trial.'

More information: MacPherson H, Richmond S, Bland M, Brealey S, Gabe R, et al. (2013) Acupuncture and Counselling for Depression in Primary Care: A Randomised Controlled Trial. *PLoS Med* 10(9): e1001518. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1001518

Provided by University of York

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