

Acupuncture Similar to Drug Treatment for Prevention of Migraine

NEW YORK (Reuters Health) Mar 01 - Acupuncture, the most frequently used preventive treatment of migraine in Germany, was as effective as common drug therapies in a large, prospective clinical trial published online in *The Lancet Neurology* on March 2.

Dr. Hans-Christoph Diener, from University Essen, and colleagues in Germany recruited patients who had between two and six migraine attacks every 4 weeks, and were diagnosed at least 26 weeks before study entry. They did not include patients with severe migraines that prevented them from going to work on more than 4 days a month.

The intent-to-treat cohort included 290 patients randomly assigned to verum acupuncture, with manually stimulated needles inserted in traditional Chinese medicine acupuncture points; and 317 assigned to sham acupuncture, in which needles were inserted in areas with no known acupuncture points and with no manual stimulation.

Patients in the acupuncture groups received 10 to 15 30-minute sessions in which up to 25 needles were inserted.

The remaining 187 patients were randomly assigned to drug treatment -- beta-blockers, flunarizine, or valproic acid. All patients kept migraine diaries for 4-week periods prior to assessments at baseline, 13 weeks, and 26 weeks.

In the intent-to-treat population, there were mean reductions in headaches per month after 26 weeks of 2.3 days in the verum group, 1.5 days in the sham group, and 2.1 days in the drug group, with no significant difference among the groups.

Outcomes on secondary measures showed significantly better reductions in pain intensity in the verum group compared with the other two groups, and in global patient assessment in the verum group compared with the drug group.

In the per-protocol analysis, the reduction in headaches per month was similar in the verum group (2.3 days, $n = 169$) and the drug group (2.7 days, $n = 83$). The 191 patients remaining in the sham group had a significantly smaller reduction in migraine days (1.3 days, $p = 0.017$ compared with verum treatment).