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Acupuncture in Routine Care Study (ARC): Effectiveness of Acupuncture in Patients with Allergic Rhinitis

Introduction: Complementary and alternative medicine treatment such as acupuncture is increasingly used by patients with allergic rhinitis (AR). The aim of the study was to investigate the effectiveness of treatment with vs. without acupuncture in patients with AR in general medical practice.

Methods: In this randomised study, patients (> 17 years) with AR were randomised either to an acupuncture group (ACU) or a control group (CON). ACU received up to 15 acupuncture treatments over a period of 3 months after entering the study whereas CON received no acupuncture in the first 3 months. CON received also up to 15 acupuncture treatments in months 4 to 6. At any time in the study ACU and CON were free to use routine care for AR. Patients filled in standardised questionnaires including socio-demographic data, rhinitis quality of life questionnaire (RQLQ, score minimum: 0; score maximum: 6) and generic quality of life (SF-36) at baseline and after 3 and 6 months.

Results: Altogether, 981 patients (64% female, 39,4±11,2years and 36% male, 40,7±13,0 years) were randomised. At baseline there were no difference between the groups in RQLQ (ACU and CON: 3,1±1,1). After 3 months there was a significant difference in the RQLQ score ($p<0,001$) in favour for ACU (ACU: 1,5±1,2 vs. CON: 2,6±1,5). The symptoms of ACU according to the RQLQ score improved again significantly ($p<0,001$) between month 3 and 6. Similarly, after 3 months we found a significant difference ($p<0,001$) in favour for ACU vs. CON on both component scales of the SF-36. After 6 months there was no significant difference for the RQLQ score and both component scales of SF-36 between both groups.

Conclusion: Patients suffering from allergic rhinitis showed a significant and clinically relevant improvement of quality of life after treatment with additional acupuncture compared to patients in routine care without acupuncture.