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Table of contents

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Introduction

Complementary and alternative medicines refer to different kinds of treatments that can be applied alongside or in place of orthodox medicine, and they can be used to treat a wide range of illnesses such as pain management and improving one's mood and wellbeing. Amongst the very common types of complementary therapies are, reflexology, hypnotherapy, aromatherapy, mindfulness, chiropractic, yoga, acupuncture, herbal medicine, reiki, shiatsu and meditation (Bupa UK, 2021).

Many complementary therapies practitioners practice without any known training, qualification, or licence. In response, the World Health Organisation (WHO) published its strategy for traditional medicine in 2002. It came up with recommendations, amongst which was for governments to formulate policies to; a) To legislate and regulate herbal products and the practice of therapies, and b) The education, training, and licensing of providers of complementary therapies practitioners in their respective countries (King's Fund, 2008).

There are two complementary and alternative therapies in the United Kingdom that have regulatory regulations for their practitioners, they are osteopathy and chiropractic. The General Osteopathic Council is responsible for registering all Osteopaths, while all chiropractors are registered with the General Chiropractic Council. The rest of the complementary and alternative therapies have voluntary registers rather than being statutorily regulated. Some of these voluntary bodies are accredited by the Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care (PSA). Among such associations are, the British Acupuncture Council, Complementary and Natural Health Council and Federation of Holistic Therapists (NHS, 2021)

History, Uses, Efficacy and Contraindications

Medical practice was a relatively homogenous field before the rise of scientific medicine in the nineteenth century. Herbal medicines were provided daily, and practitioners included not only the forerunners of today's doctors but also groups like bonesetters and healers. Those suffering from illness and disease in various cultures

were able to tap into what was then a relatively strong core of neighbourliness and community solidarity, where the human condition was understood holistically (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2021)

This essay will be looking at acupuncture as a contemporary therapy. Acupuncture is said to have originated in ancient China, where it was used as a medical technique for easing pain, curing disease, and treating general health. Its use dated back to 2500 BCE but by the late 20th century its use had spread to many other parts of the world. Acupuncture is a technique whereby one or many tiny needles are pinned into the skin and underlying tissues at places on the body (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2021)

Acupuncture is mainly used to effectively alleviate pain caused by different illnesses such as labour pain, stiff neck, Osteoarthritis, menstrual cramps, back discomfort, headaches (Mayo Clinic, 2021).

The efficacy of acupuncture has been mentioned from the results of some studies which all suggest that acupuncture may help in ameliorating certain types of discomfort, which are in most cases chronic, such as neck pain, low-back pain, and knee pain. It is suggested that acupuncture may also be used to reduce tension headaches and migraine headaches (NCCIH, 2016).

Just as it is in all medical treatments, there are some contraindications associated with the practice of acupuncture, these include a) Patients with a bleeding disorder or patients taking blood thinners. b) The insertion sites could lead to bleeding, bruising and soreness. c) Use of unsterilised needles may lead to the spread of infection on the patient. d) There is the danger that a needle may break and damage an internal organ of the patient. e) Though rare, needles inserted deeply into the chest or upper back could result in collapsed lungs (Brazier, 2017)

3. Self-regulatory Systems

Acupuncture is not regulated by law in England but the Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care website in England has an authentic list of

acupuncture practitioners (NHS, 2021). Acupuncturists in the United Kingdom are free to join a few volunteer organisations, which require them to obtain certificates, which confirm that they are appropriately trained and capable of practising their craft to a high quality. As part of their membership requirements, these organisations compel practitioners to follow a code of conduct, and in exchange, they provide membership as proof to the public that an acupuncturist has met a certain degree of certification (UK Health Centre, 2021)

The following are some examples of organisations that provide membership and benefits to acupuncturists in the United Kingdom (UK Health Centre, 2021):

- British Acupuncture Council (BAC)
- Acupuncture Association of Chartered Physiotherapists (AACP)
- British Register of Complementary Practitioners (BRCP)
- The British Medical Acupuncture Society
- British Academy of Western Medical Acupuncture (BAWMA)

If you decide to try acupuncture, you must make sure that the acupuncturist is either a licensed healthcare professional like a doctor, nurse, or physiotherapist or a member of a national acupuncture organisation (NHS, 2021).

Osteopathy and chiropractic are the only complementary and alternative therapies that have statutory regulatory bodies in the UK, and they are regulated in the same way as conventional medicine (NHS, 2018).

The complementary therapy professions in the United Kingdom have two categories of regulation under which they fall, these are voluntary self-regulation and statutory regulation.

To safeguard both the profession and the public is the primary aim of having a regulation in place in the contemporary healthcare environment. It is aimed to provide uniform and standard professionally defined training, conduct and competence for each profession to protect the public, practitioners, and employers.

The Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council (CNHC) was established in 2008 with government financing to maintain track of practitioners who satisfy national criteria, have excellent character, and are fit to practise.

4. Ethical considerations

The continued acceptance of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) has raised ethical concerns about specific aspects of both Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) and conventional medicine (COM). These ethical issues range from, a) patient information, b) research ethics, c) cost and d) education. Because the main principle of the doctor-patient relationship lies behind complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) and conventional medicine (COM) it becomes imperative that the practice of CAM and COM must have similar ethics (Teichfischer, 2012).

There are ethical and legal considerations in all healthcare practises. Being in a scenario of care puts you in a vulnerable position; as a result, health workers must be aware of their patients' vulnerability. The beneficent principle ("to do good") necessitates health care providers to operate in certain ways. that are advantageous to their patients. Furthermore, health care providers must evaluate legal problems concerning the scope of practice involving the ability to put one's knowledge into practice to keep yourself secure, complementary, and alternative medicine practitioners must possess theoretical and practical skills, as well as excellent interpersonal skills while maintaining confidentiality and privacy and always obtaining informed consent (van der Riet, 2011).

The Acupuncture Society expects all its members to follow the Society's Code of Ethics, Rules, and Regulations when conducting their professional duties.

The local Environmental Health Officer is responsible for registering those acupuncturists practising outside London and issuing them a Special treatment licence.

TO provide a safe and hygienic workplace for themselves, their colleagues, and their clients, all practitioners are expected to follow the provisions of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and any accompanying regulations. The following are the basic requirements that must be met to comply with the Act, and they are the minimum standards that the Society expects from all its members' practises.

The practitioner will work in a sterile and sanitary atmosphere. a sanitary situation, the lodging must offer a readily accessible washing facility that includes hot water, soap, and paper towels at a temperature that is appropriately controlled. The practitioner's sinks must be in or near the treatment room and must not be used for eating or anything other than handwashing before treatments.

It is necessary to keep track of medication details. It's important to think about potential side effects and known effects when combining herbs and medications. If a patient's illness is not fully understood or is expected to be serious or non-responsive to treatment, acupuncture or herbal medicine should not be provided. Such patients must be directed to contact their primary care physician, and therapy must be refused.

When consulting with patients, practitioners must provide competent, well-considered advice and must not overcharge, mislead, or continue to treat patients for long periods without achieving positive treatment outcomes. Practitioners affiliated with the Acupuncture Society will not conduct or permit anyone to administer treatments unless the Society recognises the training and qualifications of the individual.

Clients who are under the influence of alcohol, narcotics, or other hazardous substances, as well as those who haven't eaten or taken their prescribed prescription, will not be treated. The practitioner is responsible for keeping proper treatment records. The Acupuncture Society has the right to expect that all its members follow the Society's Code of Ethics, Rules, and Regulations in their professional operations.

While rendering service, the acupuncturist has a legal obligation to ensure equality and tackle discrimination within his service. This obligation applies in equal measure to both patients and workers. Discrimination on the grounds of gender, ethnicity, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation, transgender status, age, or marital status is banned by the law. When the advice or treatment you want to give clashes with your personal, religious, or moral values, it's best to notify a patient that they can see another practitioner. This conflict of interest may impair the treatment or advice you will give. As an employer, you owe the same obligation to both your patients and employees, you are also liable for any case of discrimination exhibited by your employees while under your employ (The Acupuncture Society, 2021)

Equality and Diversity policy. Discrimination and prejudice aimed at individuals or groups because of their mental health, gender, political beliefs gender identity, sexual preference, disability, partnership status, nationality, etc, are all targeted by this policy to address them (The Acupuncture Society, 2021).

Giving due respect, equality and dignity to all employees and patients regardless of their social or economic status, lifestyle, culture, race, ethnicity, or religious beliefs, or political beliefs, which may influence how they treat or advise a client.

Patients that have consumed alcohol should not be treated and if they have had a mix of alcohol, prescription, or recreational drugs, or if they have not had food in the two to three hours before to therapy. Before therapy, they are expected to have taken their prescribed medicine to the prescribed dose. Patients should be treated while laying down on the treatment couch rather than sitting in a chair to limit the chance of fainting (The Acupuncture Society, 2021).

5. Recommendations

The use of sterile needles is very much advised for any skilled and certified acupuncture practitioner, as this reduces the hazards of acupuncture to its barest minimum. Soreness and slight bleeding or bruises where the needles were implanted are common side effects. Because single-use, disposable needles are now the norm, the risk of infection is low. Though acupuncture is not appropriate for everyone (Mayo Clinic, 2021)

It's best recommended for everyone to talk to their doctor before starting acupuncture. Not everyone is a good candidate for acupuncture. Discuss all the treatments and medications you're using (including dietary supplements, prescriptions, and over-the-counter medications). Tell your doctor if you have a pacemaker, are susceptible to infection, suffer from chronic skin issues, are pregnant, or have breast or other implants. If these issues aren't addressed, acupuncture could be harmful to your health (John Hopkins Medicine, 2021).

If at all one must go for CAM, it is advisable to always seek the services of a licensed acupuncturist. Referrals to a registered or certified practitioner may be available from your doctor. Referrals from friends and family members are also possible. To practise acupuncture or become a registered acupuncturist, you do not need to be a doctor (John Hopkins Medicine, 2021).

The NICE guideline on headaches still recommends acupuncture as the only treatment for chronic tension-type headache prevention. Surprisingly, despite direct pharmacological comparisons favouring acupuncture, this guideline calculates that the anticonvulsant topiramate is twice as good as acupuncture in avoiding migraine (Cummings, Hróbjartsson and Ernst, 2018)

Conclusion

Acupuncture is generally believed to be safe for most individuals when administered by a professionally qualified practitioner, although any therapy that includes puncturing the skin with needles or manipulating the human body comes with some risk.

At present, the lack of evidence to support acupuncture as a valid method of treatment for many of the conditions that acupuncturists purport to treat is one of the obstacles to statutory regulation. Until acupuncture is proven to be a viable treatment method it is unlikely that the practice will be held to the same standards as other healthcare professions.

It is a strongly held view that further research into the effectiveness and efficacy of acupuncture and other CAMs should be intensified to clear all doubts and confusion over its usage and acceptance.

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