

## **Acupuncture Treatment for Low Back Pain in Japan from a Viewpoint of Clinical Research Papers**

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As of February 2009, by using PubMed and IchushiWeb (the Web version of Japana Centra Revuo Medicina), we can locate roughly 10 articles of randomized controlled trial (RCT) conducted in Japan on acupuncture for low back pain. Almost all of the RCTs above report positive results. Methods of point selection and stimulation are trigger points, whole body acupuncture, Ashi-points, formula acupoints, manual needling, intradermal needles and electroacupuncture.

The treatment methods in those RCTs are not always consistent with the Japanese acupuncturists' impression and sense in their clinical practice. If we conduct hand searching of the relevant articles' references and own files, we could locate about 40 more articles of the relevant RCTs (or clinical trials). In those RCTs especially conducted in 1970's and 1980's, more acupuncturists practicing everyday outside schools had participated. Since 1990's, however, most of the authors and acupuncture performers in RCTs have been teachers, researchers, or postgraduate students in acupuncture schools. Although well-designed and well-conducted RCTs can show stronger evidence, school teachers are not always "Acupuncture-Meisters". In acupuncture RCTs, involvement of practitioners' skill is one of the most important factors and a different aspect from pharmaceutical drug RCTs

In conclusion, there is a limit in seeking evidence for the usefulness of actual acupuncture practice. Also, RCTs comparing so-called real acupuncture (e.g. intramuscular needling) with so-called sham acupuncture (e.g. superficial needling) may not assess the efficacy of acupuncture but compare two different treatment methods of acupuncture. In the future, from a practical point of view, we should more focus on the clinical effect of "sham" acupuncture, better treatment method of acupuncture, and different skills of individual acupuncturists.

**Key words:** acupuncture, RCT, Japan, practitioner's skill, sham acupuncture