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Society for Acupuncture Research: 2007 Conference Report: "The Status and Future of Acupuncture Research: 10 Years Post–NIH Consensus Conference"

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On November 9–11, 2007, the Society for Acupuncture Research (SAR) hosted an international conference to mark the tenth anniversary of the landmark NIH [National Institutes of Health] Consensus Development Conference on Acupuncture. More than 300 acupuncture researchers, practitioners, students, funding agency personnel, and health policy analysts from 20 countries attended the SAR meeting, held at the University of Maryland School of Medicine, Baltimore, MD, and co-hosted by the University of Maryland Center for Integrative Medicine.

The 1997 NIH consensus panel had provided a guarded endorsement of acupuncture while concluding that the overall evidence base of randomized controlled trials was weak.[1] In the panel's opinion, there was clear evidence of acupuncture efficacy for only three conditions: adult postoperative and chemotherapy related nausea/vomiting, and postoperative dental pain. The panel also cited other conditions for which acupuncture may be effective as stand alone or adjunctive therapy. In this category were addiction, stroke rehabilitation, headache, menstrual cramps, tennis elbow, fibromyalgia, myofascial pain, osteoarthritis, low back pain, carpal tunnel syndrome, and asthma. Many clinical studies, the consensus statement asserted, "provided equivocal results because of design, sample size and other factors . . . [including] difficulties in the use of appropriate controls".

The 2007 SAR conference, through invited lectures, panel discussions and poster presentations, aimed to provide critical reviews of the several hundred clinical trials of acupuncture as well as the wide variety of physiologic studies and qualitative findings published in the past decade. The SAR conference also aimed to assess the methodological challenges still facing the design of acupuncture research and to identify important directions for future research. The implicit goal of the conference was to foster closer ties among investigators active in this expanding field of research.

This section of this issue comprises three papers containing presenter-authored summaries of the invited talks at the SAR conference. The first paper by Park et al. (pp. 871–881) addresses the current status of clinical evidence for acupuncture, summarizing research in the areas of pain, neurologic conditions, women's health, psychiatric disorders, cancer care, and functional bowel disorders. The second paper authored by Napadow et al. (pp. 861–869) summarizes our current understanding of the basic and physiologic processes believed to underlie the mechanisms by which acupuncture affects health, including acupuncture modulation of the central and peripheral nervous system, neuroendocrine system, and connective tissue. The third paper, authored by MacPherson et al. (pp. 883–887), reflects on the impact of the 1997 NIH consensus conference, provides broader perspectives on approaches to acupuncture research, emphasizes the unique contributions of qualitative methods to acupuncture research, and sets out promising directions for the future of acupuncture research.

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