Acupuncture in Australian general practice: practitioner characteristics

Gary Easthope, Justin J Beilby, Gerard F Gill and Bruce K Tranter

MJA 1998; 169: 197-200

Abstract:

Objectives: To ascertain the extent of the use of acupuncture and the characteristics of general practitioners using acupuncture.

Design: Secondary analysis of 1996 Health Insurance Commission data on claims by all non-specialist medical practitioners for Medicare Benefits Schedule items for an attendance where acupuncture was performed by a medical practitioner.

Main outcome measures: Use of acupuncture by general practitioners and the practitioners' sex, age, place of primary medical qualification, and the socioeconomic disadvantage index of the practitioners' practice.

Results: 15.1% of general practitioners claimed for acupuncture. Acupuncture was more likely to be provided by male practitioners, by those aged 35-54 years, and by practitioners who have an overseas primary medical qualification. The socioeconomic index of the practice did not significantly affect the number of claims for acupuncture.

Conclusion: Acupuncture is used by about one in seven general practitioners. Its use is associated with middle-aged practitioners, who presumably have more clinical experience. This level of use by experienced doctors suggests that a critical review of the appropriate role of acupuncture in general practice should be considered.