

NEWS RELEASE

27 June, 2008

Is acupuncture effective in the treatment of depression?

The efficacy of laser acupuncture as a credible treatment for depression will be investigated in a major new study launched by the Black Dog Institute and the University of New South Wales (UNSW). The study was announced by the Executive Director of the Black Dog Institute, Professor Gordon Parker.

“Not all patients do well on current treatments for depression and in some cases people turn to acupuncture and herbal medicine as alternative treatments,” Professor Parker stated.

Low level (therapeutic) laser acupuncture has been used in Australia to treat depression since the 1970s. The acupuncture treatment points or acupoints are stimulated with this therapeutic laser instead of needle stimulation. Laser in therapeutics originated mostly from the European nations and is gaining in popularity as it is non-invasive, does not hurt and has no infection risks

Despite numerous studies suggesting acupuncture has a role in the alleviation of depression there has been little scientific evidence to determine its efficacy, compared with medications currently prescribed.

“This new study is designed to rigorously pursue the scientific question ‘Is acupuncture an effective treatment for depression and, if so, why?’” Professor Parker said.

The study will be led by Dr Im Quah-Smith, who carried out a pilot study in 2002, using a sample of 30 patients.

“The results of the pilot were promising. Persisting alleviation of mild to moderate depressive symptoms was demonstrated following an eight-week course of laser acupuncture,” says Dr Im Quah-Smith.

In order to confirm this positive and highly significant result, a study with a larger sample is required.

As many as one in five Australians have depression. “It takes away from the individual their quality of life and their productivity while, for their families, the fallout is also distressing,” says Dr Im Quah-Smith.

The Black Dog Institute and UNSW today actively began seeking patients, aged between 18 to 50 years who suffer from mild to moderate depression, to participate in the new trial at Randwick.

People joining the trial will receive 12 free sessions of low level laser acupuncture, initially, twice a week for four weeks, and then once a week for four weeks.

To measure the effectiveness of the trial, participants will either be placed in an active laser group or a placebo group. If patients are assigned to a placebo group, they will be offered active laser acupuncture after the completion of the program.

Participants are being requested to allow one hour per session for the treatment and gathering of information.

According to Dr Im Quah-Smith, laser acupuncture is the perfect research tool as it allows for patients and researchers to be unaware of which individuals are in the active or placebo groups, thereby making the trial more scientifically rigorous.

To participate in the study: Contact (02) 96864680
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