

SURVEY

Epidemiological data on acupuncture and physical and rehabilitation medicine in the European Union

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Abstract

OBJECTIVE: To know the prevalence of acupuncturists within physical and rehabilitation medicine specialists in Europe and their characteristics, as well as to analyze the pathologies treated and therapeutic techniques used.

METHODS: This is a cross-sectional descriptive study based on a structured and closed questionnaire. The study was carried out from October 2011 to May 2014.

RESULTS: A total of 115 specialists from 19 countries completed the questionnaire. The mean characteristics of the physical and rehabilitation medicine (PRM) specialists who are also acupuncturists in Europe were: women (62.6 %); mean age of 47.91 years old; 4.20 years of physical and rehabilitation medicine school and 2.00 years of acupunc-

ture training; 15.03 years of mean time of clinical practice as physical and rehabilitation medicine specialists and 10.42 years of experience as acupuncturists; 35.65 % had a doctorate (PhD) degree, obtained at a mean age of 33.55 years old; working in a public hospital (80%); treating mainly neurological conditions (48.1%) and using mainly techniques such as kinesiotherapy (11.81%), orthosis (10.40%) and electrotherapy (9.92%). Acupuncture was applied by 32.2% of the participants mainly in musculoskeletal conditions (27.38%). A mean number of more than 20 patients a day were treated by 47.04% of the specialists, being 41.8% of the patients (adults and children). Significant differences were found between the variables, acupuncture and gender (Pearson's correlation Index = 0.007). However, no differences were observed in relation to acupuncture and age, doctorate degree, years of clinical practice and workplace (all with P values > 0.05).

CONCLUSION: In the European area, physical and rehabilitation medicine specialists who are also acupuncturists are mainly female, middle-aged, with 15 years of professional experience, PhD holders, working in public hospitals, treating mainly neurological conditions with kinesiotherapy and acupuncture, and treating over 20 patients a day (adults and children) during a 7 h shift. Further epidemiological studies on PRM to provide more information regarding the real situation of this medical specialty and the possibility to open to Chinese traditional medicine techniques such as acupuncture are necessary.

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Key words: Epidemiology; Physical and rehabilitation medicine; Acupuncture; Europe; Professional practice

INTRODUCTION

Acupuncture has been a part of Chinese traditional medicine for over 30 centuries¹ and nowadays it is a complementary therapy for western medicine.²

Acupuncture, moxibustion, electro-acupuncture, ear therapy or Chinese therapeutic massage (Tuina) can be included with no problems in the kinesiotherapy treatments. These techniques can be used as a complement for the medical management of acute and chronic conditions where the pain is the main symptom in the following type of disorders: musculo-skeletal, central and peripheral nervous system, sequels of trauma or orthopedic pathologies, myofascial syndrome in rheumatic conditions, back pain and referred pain, osteoarthritis, tennis elbow, etc.³⁻⁶ In all these cases, acupuncture allows the reduction of analgesic and anti-inflammatory drugs intake, minimizing the size effects.^{7,8}

Many researchers, in Western and Eastern countries, have been interested to clarify and understand in the last decades the mechanism of action of the acupuncture. Therefore, there has been an increase of studies on acupuncture that have been carried out following the principles of the evidence based medicine.^{9,10}

There is an increasingly frequent interest in this millenarian technique as a complement of the treatment approaches used by physical and rehabilitation medicine specialists who have a modern perspective of Chinese traditional medicine.^{11,12}

Therefore, the objective of this study was to know the prevalence of acupuncturists within physical and rehabilitation medicine specialists in the European Union, to describe their characteristics and to analyze the pathologies and therapeutic techniques used.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Design and field of intervention

This is a cross-sectional descriptive study carried out among the physical and rehabilitation medicine specialists in the European Union. The study was approved by the Bioethics Commission of the University of Extremadura.

Subjects of study

Physical and rehabilitation medicine specialists who met the inclusion criteria: qualification as physical and rehabilitation medicine specialist, working or having worked as rehabilitation specialist in any country of the European Union. The exclusion criteria were: not to meet the inclusion criteria.

Measurement tools

The voluntary completion of a questionnaire was re-

quested through the European Association of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine and its different branches. The questionnaire was closed and structured and consisted of 15 items. It was available in Google Docs from October 2011 until May 2014 in the following link:

<https://spreadsheets.google.com/spreadsheet/viewform?formkey=dHNOQjBRRlpoa00zamlvLVpnM0JqT-Gc6MQ>.

Outcome measures

Socio-demographic data: age, sex, country of residence. Data related to professional practice as PRM specialist and acupuncturist: training (years of medical school, years of PRM studies, doctorate (PhD), presentation and defense of doctoral thesis); private practice or public health system practice and years of professional experience; treated pathologies and techniques used; number of patients treated daily and their age.

Statistical analysis

The Statistic Packet Social Science (SPSS) statistical software, 15.0 version for Windows was used for the analysis of the data (Chicago, IL, USA). A descriptive study was carried out and the percentages of the different categories of the qualitative variables and the mean values and standard deviation of the quantitative variables were calculated. In addition, a comparison between the variables of study through an inferential analysis was done to know if there was any significant relation between them. This was completed with the statistical values of Pearson's correlation index considering statistically significant a value of $P < 0.05$.

RESULTS

The answers of the questionnaire registered from October 2011 to May 2014 were analyzed. The register showed that 43 questionnaires were completed from October to December 2011, 68 during the year 2012, 2 in the year 2013 and 2 from January to May 2014. Therefore, the answers obtained were analyzed after data unification (when necessary) was done on December 2013.

A total of 115 physical and rehabilitation medicine specialists participated in the study. Out of the total number, 72 were women and 43 were men (62.6% and 37.4% respectively). Their countries of origin included a total of 19 countries, 16 were European and Martinique (in the peripheral region of the European Union) and Turkey and Tunisia as Mediterranean countries were added. The questionnaires were completed in a greater number by participants from Spain (25 cases) followed by Portugal (22 cases), Turkey (19 cases) and Croatia (18 cases). Considering as a reference the number of practicing physical and rehabilitation medicine (PRM) specialists according to European Union of Medical Specialists (UEMS) Member States data,¹³

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