

## Research paper

# Evaluating research information on practitioner websites describing the use of acupuncture as an adjunct to IVF<sup>☆</sup>

Sarah Fogarty<sup>\*</sup>, Caroline A. Smith

National Institute of Complementary Medicine, University of Western Sydney, Australia

Received 2 February 2015; received in revised form 7 July 2015; accepted 8 July 2015

## Abstract

**Introduction:** Despite the advances in assisted reproductive technologies the live birth rate remains low. In response to the high rates of unsuccessful treatment, and stress arising from repeated IVF cycles, women seek out other forms of treatment, such as acupuncture, to optimise their chance of achieving a successful pregnancy, live birth and to manage their infertility related stress.

**Method:** An internet search for Acupuncture and IVF websites from Sydney, New South Wales was undertaken and websites meeting the inclusion criteria were appraised using a modified assessment tool. The website was then evaluated.

**Results:** 137 sites were identified with forty-seven websites eligible for appraisal. The majority of acupuncture websites did not present accurate and quality information. Some acupuncture websites made unsubstantiated claims about the effectiveness of acupuncture resulting in the potential to mislead consumers about the benefits of acupuncture. This occurred in a number of ways such as not reporting full research findings or providing details on the clinical population, presenting incomplete data, omitting important data and claims of benefit with little research evidence or low levels of research evidence.

**Conclusion:** Our analysis of websites promoting acupuncture use for IVF showed that the information used on websites contains many inaccuracies. Improving the quality of IVF acupuncture websites to protect the consumer is needed, and this study highlights a continuing need to improve research literacy among acupuncturists.

© 2015 Elsevier GmbH. All rights reserved.

**Keywords:** IVF; Acupuncture

## 1. Background

Complementary and Alternative Medicines (CAM) are commonly used both in Australia and overseas [1,2] and usage is reported to be increasing [2]. Recent findings found 79% of a sample of Australians had used CAM in the last 12 months [2]. A small percentage of the 79% (17.6%) would try CAM therapies before using conventional medicine [2]. A systematic review of CAM use in the UK found the average one-year prevalence rate of CAM use was 41.1% [3] and the average in the U.S. was 33.2% [4]. CAM use is not often disclosed to

medical practitioners [1,5] and thus the information about CAM therapy from healthcare professionals is limited. Information about CAM therapies and health comes from various sources but increasingly via the Internet [6,7] and thus consumers are faced with the difficult task of appraising the quality, accuracy and currency of the content of websites [6,7].

CAM therapy use is also increasing for those wishing to conceive and those expecting [8,9] as well as those exploring its use for assisted reproduction. Despite the advances in assisted reproductive technologies the live birth rate remains low, with 17% of live births resulting from 70,000 treatment cycles [10]. In response to the high rates of unsuccessful treatment, and stress arising from repeated IVF cycles, women seek out other forms of treatment to optimise their chance of achieving a successful pregnancy, live birth and to manage their infertility related stress [11]. Use of complementary therapies such as acupuncture, and herbs, to reduce psychological distress, and provide adjunct-

<sup>☆</sup> This article belongs to the Special Issue on Complementary Medicine for Sexual and Reproductive Health.

<sup>\*</sup> Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [doctorfogarty@gmail.com](mailto:doctorfogarty@gmail.com) (S. Fogarty).

tive treatment to improve outcomes are increasingly common [11–14]. Whilst the clinical evidence of adjunctive acupuncture to improve live births currently suggests no benefit [15], a review of studies describing women's experiences of acupuncture for infertility found that women described acupuncture as empowering, and broader improvements to their well-being were reported [16].

Providing fertility support by acupuncture practitioners is common [17]. Australian and New Zealand acupuncturists frequently report treating general fertility conditions, biomedical fertility conditions, and addressing fertility related stress [17,18]. The majority of acupuncturist's receive frequent self-referral from their clients [17], and to promote their practice use various modes of promotional material including social media, paid advertising, and promotional talks in the community. Written information on practice websites is common and enables acupuncturists to communicate to patients the benefits and risks of treatment, and to facilitate informed decision making about their health options. This website information can shape patients expectations, and influence healing [19]. Advertising standards developed by the Chinese Medicine Board of Australia provide guidelines on acceptable advertising and emphasise the need for information to be based on the highest quality scientific evidence available, and that the quality of the evidence should be communicated accurately to the potential/existing patients [20].

With the increasing use of acupuncture to support and treat fertility related conditions, and mixed research findings describing the clinical outcome of acupuncture as an adjunct to IVF, we were interested to examine how this was communicated to patients. The aim of this study was to examine the quality and accuracy of research information communicating the effects of acupuncture as an adjunct to IVF on practice websites.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Study population and setting

In June 2014, 4271 practitioners (in all categories of Chinese Medicine) were registered with the Chinese Medicine Registration Board of Australia [21]. The sample for this study was selected from the Australian state with the largest number of acupuncture practitioners (including registration in acupuncture and other e.g. Chinese Herbal dispenser). New South Wales met these criteria and we refined the sample further to focus on the major metropolitan city, Sydney.

Acupuncture websites were identified from an Internet search using the 'Google' browser. The search terms 'acupuncture' and 'IVF' and 'Sydney' with limits on country (Australia only) and time (within the past 12 months) was run. The search was run over a two-week period in June 2014. Sites underwent an initial screening by SF. Practice websites were screened for (1) acupuncture treatment provided for infertility/fertility support as a major focus, and (2) detailed information presented on the website describing a role of acupuncture to help women seeking fertility support and treatment. Websites that included information on other conditions acupuncturists treat were included however websites that mention fertility or IVF in

passing only i.e. as one of many conditions acupuncture could benefit such as pain, fertility, headaches, etc. were excluded. For sites that were identified as partially meeting the inclusion criteria further review was undertaken by SF and CS, and the material discussed to reach a consensus.

### 2.2. The assessment tool

Websites that met the inclusion criteria had the content of their website analysed using a modified assessment tool [22]. A copy of the modified tool can be seen in Appendix 1. The assessment tool was modified to make it specific to IVF and the use of research on websites. Some questions from the original tool, which were not relevant, were deleted. The focus of this instrument was to appraise how research was used and interpreted. The purpose of the appraisal criteria was to assess the robustness of the research used on the website, the statistical content, the usefulness of the research/information presented and how well the research related to the readers. Scoring for the criteria used the responses: yes, no or partially. No numerical value was allocated to yes, no or partially responses. There were a total of 21 items. The scoring for this assessment tool can be interpreted qualitatively and or through content analysis and frequency counts.

### 2.3. Data extraction and analysis

Each website was assigned a unique identifying number. The website was then evaluated using the modified criteria of appraisal tool for the presentation of research findings [22]. For trials meeting the screening criteria further data was extracted from the website and then appraised. In addition the claims that each website made about the effects of acupuncture were also extracted and recorded including which effects were supported by evidence and which effects were not backed up by evidence. The researchers then descriptively summarised the data in relation to each of the criteria.

## 3. Results

During the two-week period a total of 137 sites were identified (Fig. 1). Twenty-five websites appeared in the 'Google' search multiple times and these duplicates were removed. Further screening of 112 sites was undertaken. Fifteen sites were excluded because IVF/fertility acupuncture was not the main focus of clinical practice reported on the websites, and there was no mention of research or statements relating to acupuncture fertility/IVF. Forty-seven websites were eligible for appraisal.

Following a review of the 32 websites only one website met the majority of the appraisal criteria (19 items met the 'yes' criteria out of a possible total of 21). This website was clearly superior to the other websites in its robustness and usefulness of the research reported on the website. The site listed and summarised IVF/fertility research including research that had positive, negative or no difference in the clinical outcomes, it identified key findings from systematic reviews for IVF and acupuncture, identified the benefits for acupuncture (for IVF/fertility) and

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5807480>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5807480>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)