

Acupuncture for the Management of Chronic Pelvic Pain in Adolescents

Yuan-Chi Lin, MD, MPH, FAAP

Department of Anesthesia, Children's Hospital Boston; Harvard Medical School, Boston, Massachusetts

Introduction: Endometriosis is the growth of endometrium outside the uterine cavity or myometrium, usually in the peritoneal cavity. Chronic pelvic pain related to endometriosis can occur in adolescents. This can be a very disruptive disease and cause significant dysfunction at a time in life when self-esteem and school performance are critical to achieve life goals. We report our experience in integrating acupuncture as a complementary medical therapy for endometriosis related chronic pelvic pain in adolescents.

Methods: This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board. A written informed consent was obtained prior to the acupuncture treatment. Pediatric patients, less than eighteen-year-old, with the diagnosis of endometriosis related chronic pelvic pain were included in this study. All the patients were referred by pediatric gynecologists/adolescent medicine specialists or pediatric pain specialists. Acupuncture was performed based on Traditional Chinese Medicine by the same acupuncturist. An associate other than the acupuncturist obtained pain intensity score based on the Visual Analogue Scale (VAS) from 0 to 10, at the beginning of each visit. The acupuncture treatment protocol includes an initial comprehensive evaluation followed with six weekly sessions of treatment. After the six sessions' treatment, patients may electively continue bi-monthly treatment.

Results: Twelve female adolescent patients were referred for the evaluation and management of endometriosis related pelvic pain from January 2002 to December 2003. Ten patients with the average age of 14.5 ± 0.7 year-old (mean \pm S.D.), completed six sessions of acupuncture treatment. Analyzing the VAS pain scores, there was a marked downward trend in the pain scores. The mean VAS pain scores for the patients were 7.7 ± 1.3 , 6.9 ± 1.9 , 5.9 ± 1.5 , 6.0 ± 1.7 , 5.1 ± 1.5 , 4.3 ± 1.6 , at the first to 6th sessions of treatment, respectively. Patients reported missed less school, increased activity level, and felt more relaxed. No adverse reactions were reported related to the acupuncture treatment.

Discussion: Adolescents with endometriosis related pelvic pain can be managed medically or surgically.¹ Our experience indicates that acupuncture is well tolerated and a beneficial complementary method for the treatment of endometriosis related chronic pelvic pain in adolescents. Further prospective randomized controlled study is needed to evaluate the short term and long term effect of acupuncture in the management chronic pelvic pain in adolescents.

References

1. Olive D, Pritts E. Drug Therapy: Treatment of Endometriosis. *New England Journal of Medicine*. 2001;345(4):266-275.