

Conference Report

The 3rd JSAM International Symposium on Evidence-based Acupuncture – Evidence of the Effectiveness of Acupuncture for Headache -

Hitoshi Yamashita
Graduate School of Health Sciences,
Morinomiya University of Medical Sciences,
Osaka, Japan

On June 7 and 8, 2012, the 3rd JSAM International Symposium on Evidence-based Acupuncture was held at Yokkaichi Municipal Culture Hall in Mie Prefecture, under the sponsorship of The Japan Society of Acupuncture and Moxibustion (President: Shuji Goto). JSAM has previously held its first international symposium in 2006 themed on osteoarthritis of the knee, and the second symposium in 2009 themed on low back pain, to promote understanding of the concept of evidence-based medicine (EBM) among its members, and to reinvigorate studies that present clinical evidence of acupuncture and moxibustion in Japan based on an awareness of the status of overseas studies. This third symposium was themed on headaches, and also included a program for discussing sham acupuncture, which is causing a controversy about the appropriateness of its control groups.

Pre-symposium lectures first introduced the features of Japanese acupuncture to participants from Japan and overseas. Based on surveys, six speakers gave lectures on the present state of acupuncture practice in Japan, the characteristics of acupuncture patients, the history and present state of pediatric acupuncture and meridian therapy, and an overview of Japanese acupuncture in Europe.

Session 1 began after the opening ceremony. Dr. Sakai Fumihiko (Saitama Neuropsychiatric Institute) and Prof. Hisaka Igarashi (Kanagawa Dental College of Medicine Yokohama Clinic), leading authorities on headache research in Japan gave a presentation on the latest classification of

headaches and the characteristics of headache patients. Next, Prof. Byung-Cheul Shin (School of Korean Medicine, Pusan National University) lectured on acupuncture and moxibustion therapy for headaches in South Korea, followed by Ms. Mari Suzuki (Saitama Medical University), who gave a report on acupuncture and moxibustion case series studies in university hospitals in Japan.

Session 2 was themed on acupuncture for headaches. Prof. Benno Brinkhaus (Institute for Social Medicine, Epidemiology and Health Economics, Charité University Medical Center) introduced the results of large-scale RCTs on acupuncture for headache that was conducted in Germany, and gave his interpretation of the overall evidence. Dr. Myeong Soo Lee (Korea Institute of Oriental Medicine) gave an outline of systematic reviews of RCT papers on acupuncture for headache, and noted the problems in the quality of RCTs on acupuncture. Mr. Tomokazu Kikuchi (Saitama Medical University) mainly reported on the results of a basic research on acupuncture for primary headache conducted by the research team to which he belongs.

In Session 3 held on the following day, Prof. Shoko Masuyama (Morinomiya University of Medical Sciences) gave an overview of clinical trials of acupuncture in Japan, and underlined some issues on quality of the studies. Prof. Brinkhaus discussed research methodology in clinical trial on acupuncture, and emphasized that the selection of trial design and control group depends on the primary research question. Mr. Yasuhisa Kaneko (Tokyo College of Medico-Pharmaco Technology) introduced the thumbtack needle effect in the sports field, followed by Prof. Kenji Kawakita (Meiji University of Integrative Medicine), who explained the mechanisms of physiological activities produced

by various sham interventions used in recent clinical trials of acupuncture, and logically emphasized that even shallow stimulations on the skin can have a clinical effect. Lastly, Dr. Stephen Birch (Foundation for the Study of Traditional East Asian Medicine, Amsterdam) pointed to the fact that sham acupuncture in RCTs are frequently misinterpreted by reviewers and readers, although it is not a placebo treatment, and expressed his concern that wrong study designs are being selected for the relevant research question.

In Japan, acupuncture and moxibustion have been utilized to treat diseases and maintain health since olden days as a matter of course, precisely because they existed as traditional medicine. For this reason, the idea of examining the evidence that acupuncture and moxibustion are effective had never emerged until recently. As a result, clinical studies that are conducted in Japan from the standpoint of EBM have lagged behind foreign countries. This symposium is thought to have provided a renewed awareness of this issue and other such issues among acupuncture and moxibustion researchers and school teachers in Japan. It was particularly a large achievement that acupuncture and moxibustion researchers and clinicians acquired a common understanding of the need to disseminate information about the characteristics of Japanese acupuncture and moxibustion and papers that introduce Japanese acupuncture and moxibustion to the outside world, as well as the need to more accurately evaluate the clinical effects and physiological activity of sham needling that is used in the Western countries as a placebo control group and the comprehensive clinical effects of acupuncture that includes not only specific effects but also skin stimulation effects.

The symposium underlined the importance of organizing more international symposiums, workshops and other similar opportunities in Japan in order to foment greater understanding of Japanese acupuncture and moxibustion.