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Project title

A Controlled Trial of Self-administered Acupressure in Adult Psychiatric Patients with Constipation

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Introduction

Constipation is common among psychiatric patients. Its symptoms not only enhance patients' suffering and reduce quality of life but also increase the treatment costs. However, pharmacological treatment only relieves its symptom severity in short term and the longer-term side-effects of drugs may far outweigh its therapeutic effects. Therefore, non-pharmacological alternative approaches (e.g., acupressure) in managing constipation of psychiatric patients may be a better alternative.

Objectives

This study was to test the effectiveness of a self-administered acupressure program in reducing adult psychiatric patients' symptoms of constipation and enhancing their quality of life, and also to explore their perceived benefits and limitations.

Methodology

A double-blinded RCT with repeated-measures, sham group design was used. In addition, focus group interview was conducted to explore the participants' perceived benefits and limitations of the acupressure intervention used. Seventy-eight patients were recruited between April and October 2013 from forensic psychiatric team in a 1,000-bed regional psychiatric hospital in Hong Kong. After matched in pairs in terms of gender, age, and laxatives used, each patient in the matched pairs was randomly assigned into either the intervention (self-administered acupressure program) or sham (placebo) group. The intervention group received training in self-administered acupressure, while the sham (control) group was also trained with similar technique, except using the non-acupoints with light pressure applied, and gentle rubbing on the abdomen with very minimal pressure. All participants implemented their interventions once a day for 10 days.

Result

At the 2-week follow-up, participants in the intervention group were found to have greater improvements in both symptoms severity of constipation and quality of life as revealed by the significant differences in mean scores of CAS ($p < 0.0005$, GEE test) and PAC-QOL ($p < 0.0005$, GEE test) between the 2 groups. Participants' perceived benefits of the program obtained from the focus group data also affirmed the improvement in their symptoms severity of constipation, physical and psychosocial health conditions and job performance. The perceived obstacles to their implementation of this intervention after their discharge included social stigma embarrassment, reduced motivation, and lack of essential equipment for practices. Conclusion: The self-administered acupressure programme for adult psychiatric in-patients facilitated by

trained mental health nurses in Hong Kong with a validated protocol was found effective in reducing their symptoms severity of constipation and improving their quality of life.