Medical acupuncture as an adjunctive treatment for oncological patients.

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INTRODUCTION

Acupuncture is an integrated therapeutic system with a history of more than 2500 years. Medical acupuncture is the incorporation of traditional acupuncture techniques into modern western medical practice.



BACKGROUND

Medical acupuncture has well-established analgesic, anti-hypertensive, anti-stress, anti-emetic actions, as well as regulatory effects on the immune and neuroendocrine systems. Over the last years medical acupuncture has been extensively investigated regarding its potential beneficial effects on oncological patients.



RESULTS

Specifically, medical acupuncture has been found to be effective in the treatment of pain and peripheral neuropathy, nausea and vomiting associated with chemotherapy, xerostomia after radiotherapy of head and neck tumors, hot flushes and chemotherapy-induced neutropenia. It is also beneficial for the treatment of stress, anxiety, depression, insomnia and gastrointestinal disorders (such as constipation or diarrhea), conditions commonly seen in oncological patients.

CONCLUSION

Medical acupuncture is a safe, effective and inexpensive treatment modality that should be part of the armamentarium of every oncology department, since it can significantly improve patients' quality of life.



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