

Patient demographics at an urban acupuncture teaching clinic

Abstract

The primary aim of our study was to describe the demographic characteristics of acupuncture patients in an urban teaching clinic and the diagnoses of those patients. The demographics of those seeking acupuncture treatments at the University of Bridgeport Acupuncture Institute clinic are primarily female, mostly Caucasian, with an average age of 55.7 years. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) patient demographics at an urban teaching clinic match those in other settings around the world.

Keywords: urban acupuncture, traditional Chinese medicine, tcm clinic data, electronic health records, ehr system

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Abbreviations: TCM, traditional Chinese medicine; EHRs, electronic health records; CGM, compagnie générale maritime

Background

The demographics of those seeking acupuncture and related Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) treatments in a variety of teaching centers has been discussed in several articles.¹⁻⁹ The demographics of acupuncture patients in these studies were similar. In the US, the majority of patients were Caucasian females.¹⁻⁴ In Korean settings, the majority of patients were Asian with less of a gap between the genders.^{5,6} Recognizing that TCM clinical experiences change over time and practice varies in different settings, there is a need to conduct evaluations of TCM clinic data to better inform TCM education and clinical training in the US.

The primary aim of our study was to describe the demographic characteristics of acupuncture patients in an urban teaching clinic and the diagnoses (identified by ICD10 coding) of those patients. Our secondary aim was to compare these profiles of acupuncture patients with those done in other studies and other types of treatment settings.

Methods

This study was a retrospective review of the electronic health records (EHRs) of patients who had received at least one session of acupuncture at the UB Acupuncture Clinics during one academic year (2 semesters). We performed an electronic chart review at the University of Bridgeport Acupuncture Institute teaching clinic, part of the "UB Clinics" in Bridgeport, CT. Information that existed in automatically extractable form was collected in a predefined Excel spreadsheet. Unidentified patient data of those who had received acupuncture (as identified as being billed with the CPT code 97810) were extracted from the Electronic health Record (EHR). Specifically, patient ID numbers, gender, age, self-identified race information and ICD10 diagnoses were extracted to an Excel spreadsheet. This information existed in automatically extractable form due to the use of an electronic health record (EHR). After extraction, the data was analyzed for demographic and diagnostic groupings.

The primary diagnoses (ICD 10 Codes) were based on the patient's history, clinical examination and previously diagnosed diseases. All ICD 10 codes were selected by the student interns and verified by

the supervising clinicians. The Senior Clinical Administrator for the UB Clinics, who was not involved in this study, oversaw the data extraction. All extracted data from the EHRs database was done by the company who provides the EHR system (CGM).

Findings

During the 2016 Academic year (9/12/15 to 6/15/16) there were 3836 Acupuncture patient visits in the UB Clinics. Of these, a majority were female, with an average age in their fifties and a chief complaint of pain. This compares favorably with the previous demographic surveys.

Study Location	% Female	% Male
UB	73	27
Other US Studies (1-4)	70	30
UK (8)	74	26
Korea (5, 6)	57	43

	UB Clinics	USA	UK	Korea
Under 21	1.5			
21-40	16.9	19.2	19.5	25.4
41-50	16.5	21.7	22.4	25.9
51-60	24.6	26.5	28.7	27.6
61-80	36.3	28.9	26.2	19.4
over 80 years	4.2	3.7	3.2	1.7
Average	55.7	42.5	51	52.0

UB Clinics Acupuncture Patients Self-Identified Race	%
Asian	5.6
African American	7.4
Caucasian/non-Latino	65.9
Other	19.9

Diseases diagnosed by clinicians at the UB Clinics TCM teaching clinic were grouped by ICD10 category. During patient assessment, those treated in the UB Clinics with acupuncture had the following top primary groups of diagnoses:

Category of Diagnosis	Percentage (%)
Musculoskeletal Diagnoses	49.9
General Wellness	12.9
Nervous System Disorders	8.7
Mental/Behavioral Diseases	6.4
Digestive Disorders/Illnesses	6.3
Female Genitourinary Diseases	4.1
Other, Misc.	11.7
Total	100

The number of visits each individual patient was seen during this timeframe ranged from single visits to over 11 visits per year. While both men and women clustered in the 2 to 5 visit range, suggestive of people coming to be treated for a specific complaint, women were more likely to be “super users”.⁹ of acupuncture at a rate of 16.4% compared to 7% of men being seen more than 10 times per year (Figure 1).

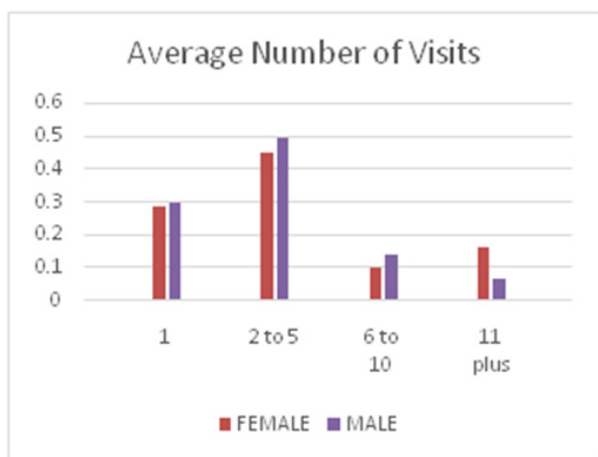


Figure 1 The number of visits each individual patient.

# of Visits to UB Clinics	Female	Male
1	28.40%	29.60%
2 to 5	44.80%	49.30%
6 to 10	10.30%	14.10%
11 plus	16.40%	7%

Discussion

The UB Clinics is a teaching clinic associated with a university situated near the Long Island Sound in the south end of Bridgeport Connecticut, and low-income urban area with a median per capita income of \$ 22,422. In Connecticut, many healthcare insurers cover acupuncture treatments for pain diagnoses. However, acupuncture is not covered by Medicare or Medicaid services in CT. The comparatively low cost of our acupuncture services is probably one factor in seeing patients in our teaching clinic, especially for those over 65 years of age. It is also possible that people seeking more information about acupuncture “try” the UB Clinics because it is a teaching clinic.

The patients’ demographic characteristics for the UB Clinics were similar to other published demographic studies of acupuncture. Namely, our patients were primarily female, mostly Caucasian, with an average age of 55.7 years. The average number of individual patient visits was four.⁴ during this time period. Diseases diagnosed by our clinicians at the TCM teaching clinic were primarily those of the musculoskeletal system.

This study compares favorably with previous acupuncture studies in various treatment settings.

Instructors teaching acupuncture in the US need to be sure student interns are prepared to treat patients with musculoskeletal pain and neurological disorders with special emphasis on those over 50 years of age.

Conclusion

The demographics of those seeking acupuncture treatments at the University of Bridgeport Acupuncture Institute clinic are primarily female, mostly Caucasian, with an average age of 55.7 years. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) patient demographics at an urban teaching clinic match those in other settings around the world.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests.

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