

February 28, 2010

Dear American Cancer Society,

First, I would like to say that I support and applaud the efforts of your organization. Through the years, ACS has been a beacon of hope for so many individuals stricken with cancer, and their loved ones. ACS is truly a pioneer in the field of cancer research, detection and treatment.

That is why I am concerned about the information given on the ACS website concerning acupuncture and its use as an alternative treatment for some of the symptoms of cancer and its primary treatment. Although ACS has done its research, some of the "facts" are slanted and even take on an appearance of bias against acupuncture.

ACS states:

"Although available evidence does not suggest acupuncture is effective as a treatment for cancer, clinical studies have found it may help treat nausea caused by chemotherapy drugs and surgical anesthesia. It may also help relieve pain after dental surgery. ...It may be useful for treating headaches, helping in rehabilitation from strokes, and treating a number of musculoskeletal conditions."

According to The World Health Organization (WHO), "Diseases, symptoms or conditions for which acupuncture has been proved-through controlled trials-to be an effective treatment" include:

- adverse reactions to radiotherapy and/or chemotherapy
- nausea and vomiting
- pain in dentistry (including dental pain and temporomandibular dysfunction)
- headache
- low back pain
- stroke.

ACS also states:

"Although the scientific evidence is not strong, acupuncture may prove to be useful by itself or when combined with mainstream therapies to treat headache, menstrual cramps, tennis elbow, fibromyalgia, myofascial pain, osteoarthritis, lower back pain, carpal tunnel syndrome and asthma, and to help in the rehabilitation of stroke patients. Further research is needed in these areas."

Again, according to WHO under the same category of "Diseases, symptoms or conditions for which acupuncture has been proved-through controlled trials-to be an effective treatment", you will find:

- headache
- menstrual cramps (dysmenorrhea)
- tennis elbow
- carpal tunnel syndrome
- stroke.

WHO has three additional categories that list conditions for which further research is needed. Please see <http://apps.who.int/medicinedocs/en/d/Js4926e/5.html#Js4926e.5> for the complete list.

Lastly, and perhaps most distressing to myself and other acupuncture practitioners who daily try so hard to educate people about this comparatively safe, gentle and truly amazing healing modality, is how ACS chooses to talk about side effects and complications of acupuncture:

“Traditional needle acupuncture can cause dizziness, fainting, local internal bleeding, convulsions, hepatitis B, dermatitis, nerve damage, and increased pain. Rarely, punctured lungs have happened, resulting in a few deaths. Traditional acupuncture also poses risks such as infection from contaminated needles or improper delivery of treatment. The risk of infection is much lower now that acupuncturists in the United States use sterile, single-use needles.”

Yes, when you work with needles it is a given that there are risks involved. But a licensed acupuncturist, like any licensed healthcare professional, practices universal precautions. We are trained and certified in clean needle technique. We also get rigorous training in anatomy and physiology. We know exactly where we are putting those needles, and what the underlying anatomical structures are. And yes, there is always a risk of infection from a contaminated needle, but one runs that risk when getting blood drawn, donating blood, getting a vaccination or receiving a chemotherapy injection. Acupuncture needles are prepackaged, sterile and FDA regulated. Even the National Center for Complementary and Alternative medicine states that:

“Relatively few complications from the use of acupuncture have been reported to the FDA, in light of the millions of people treated each year and the number of acupuncture needles used. “

When choosing an acupuncturist, as with any healthcare professional, one should do one's homework and choose a practitioner who is licensed and well qualified to practice, thereby minimizing the inherent risks involved.

I would respectfully request that ACS revise its website's section on acupuncture to correct these inaccuracies. The American Cancer Society's mission statement says that it is dedicated to, among other things, diminishing suffering from cancer. Acupuncture, in the hands of a skilled practitioner, can go a long way to doing just that. After all, in the end, don't we all want the same thing?

Respectfully Yours,  
Joy Lindquist, L.Ac.  
Brooklyn, NY