

UK Awards –£1.3 Million for CAM Research

ACUPUNCTURE AMONG FIRST THERAPIES TO BE INVESTIGATED

Editorial Staff

The British government has announced the creation of a new program to study the benefits of certain forms of complementary and alternative medicine. The National Complementary and Alternative Medicines Award Scheme (NCAMAS) will use an initial grant of £1.3 million (approximately \$2.075 million U.S. dollars) from the Department of Health to fund research into five alternative medicine projects, including two on acupuncture.

The NCAMAS was created in response to recommendations made by the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology. In November 2000, the committee published a report on complementary and alternative medicine, and suggested that CAM practitioners and researchers "attempt to build up an evidence base with the same rigor as is required of conventional medicine, using both RCTs (randomized, controlled trials) and, when appropriate, other research designs" such as focus groups, single case designs and open-ended studies.¹

"Increasingly, the population is turning to complementary and alternative medicine sources, as well as utilizing mainstream medicine," commented Minister of Public Health Hazel Blears. "The development of a solid evidence base for complementary and alternative medicine is therefore important. I anticipate it will underpin the future integration of all forms of therapy towards improving the nation's health."²

Recent studies into the use of complementary and alternative medicine appear to bear out Blears' statement. According to the BBC News, Britons spend approximately £130 million a year on CAM, up 60 percent from five years ago; spending is expected to increase to almost £200 million by 2008.²

Two award recipients will use their share of the funds to conduct studies on the effectiveness of acupuncture. In the first acupuncture study, Dr. Peter White, a research physiotherapist at the University of Southampton, will conduct a randomized, controlled trial to evaluate the process of acupuncture treatment. In the second, Dr. Hugh MacPherson, a researcher at York University, will examine acupuncture's role in treating depression.

Both MacPherson and White are considered luminaries in the field of acupuncture research, especially in Europe. White has had several articles published in peer-reviewed journals, and has worked extensively with Dr. George Lewith to improve the quality of acupuncture studies in Great Britain and elsewhere. MacPherson, meanwhile, has published more than 40 articles on acupuncture in scientific journals, and coordinated the group that designed the STRICTA recommendations for acupuncture trials.

The other researchers will examine the use of CAM by male cancer patients and overall CAM use for the treatment of asthma; homeopathic remedies for chronic fatigue syndrome; and clinical-decision-making of homeopathic physicians. The awards cover full salary costs and overhead for each researcher, and include a stipend of £5,000 a year for tuition fees and research expenses for a

period of three years. An independent researcher will also be assigned to work with each award recipient.³

Based on the success of the current studies and the quality of applications for future CAM studies, the NCAMAS plans to increase funding in the coming years, with a goal of 30 research and postdoctoral awards being presented annually.

References

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