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Physician Survey Gives Acupuncture High Marks

DOCTORS REMAIN SPLIT ON ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE'S OVERALL IMPACT

Michael Devitt

A new survey has found that most physicians consider acupuncture to be more effective than any other form of complementary and alternative medicine currently practiced in the United States. The survey has also revealed deep divisions on the perceived impact of CAM on the quality of health care in the United States. Despite these beliefs, a majority of doctors have recommended some form of alternative medicine to their patients in the past, and an equal number feel the National Institutes of Health should continue to fund research on alternative medicine.



The 31-question survey was conducted by HCD Research, a New Jersey-based marketing and research firm, and the New York-based Louis Finkelstein Institute, over a two-day period in September 2005. A total of 873 physicians participated in the survey.

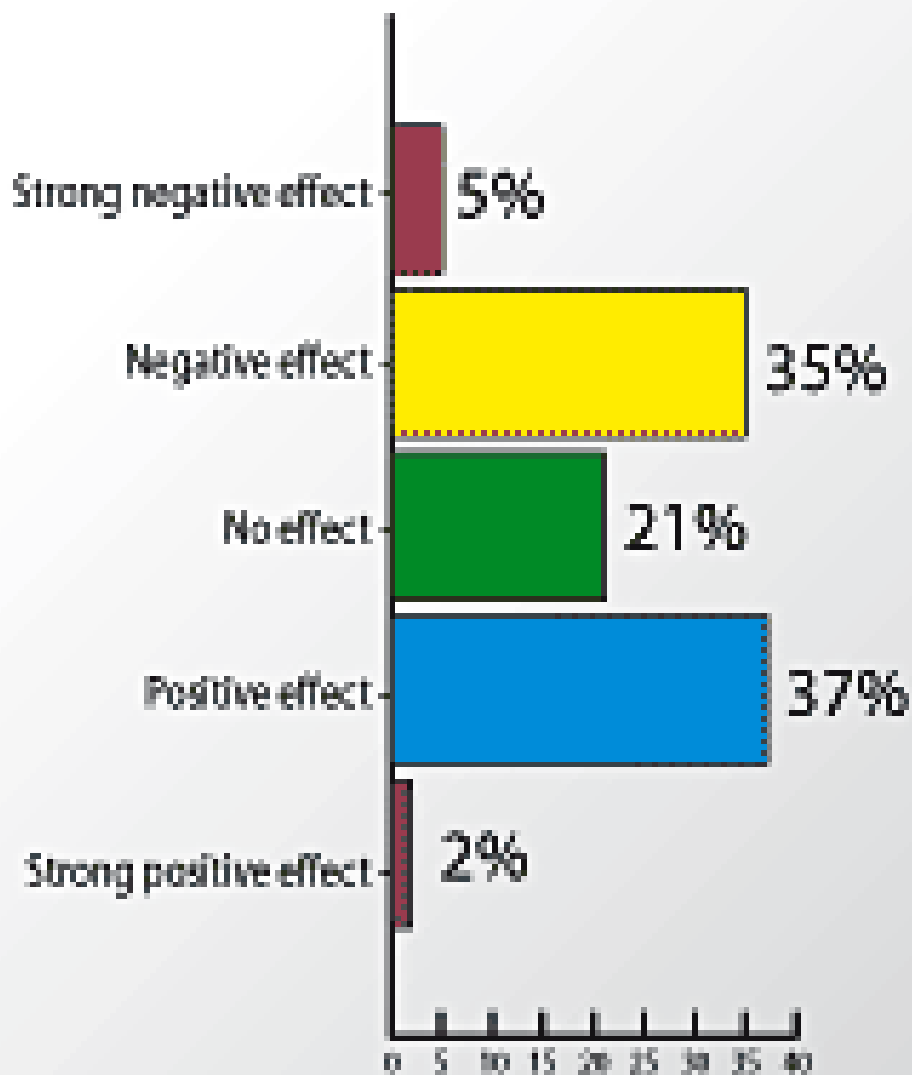
In addition to questions on the overall effect of alternative medicine on American health care, respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of 12 forms of CAM (acupuncture, traditional Chinese medicine, aromatherapy, biofield therapies, chiropractic, dietary supplements, electromagnetic field therapies, homeopathy, hypnosis, massage therapy, mind-body interventions, and naturopathy) from two perspectives: both as a standalone therapy, and when used as a complement to conventional medical treatment. Each form was rated on a seven-point scale, with seven considered "highly effective."

Results

Physicians were almost equally divided in their beliefs on alternative medicine. While 39 percent believed alternative medicine had a positive effect on the quality of health care in the U.S., 40 percent believed it had a negative effect; the remainder thought alternative medicine had no effect on the quality of health care.

A slight majority of physicians believed alternative medicine to be beneficial to their patients. Fifty-one percent stated that alternative medicine was "usually helpful" or "helpful to patients in some circumstances." However, 28 percent believed that alternative medicine could be harmful to some degree, and another 15 percent attributed the helpful effects of alternative medicine to the placebo effect.

How does alternative medicine generally affect the quality of health care in the United States?

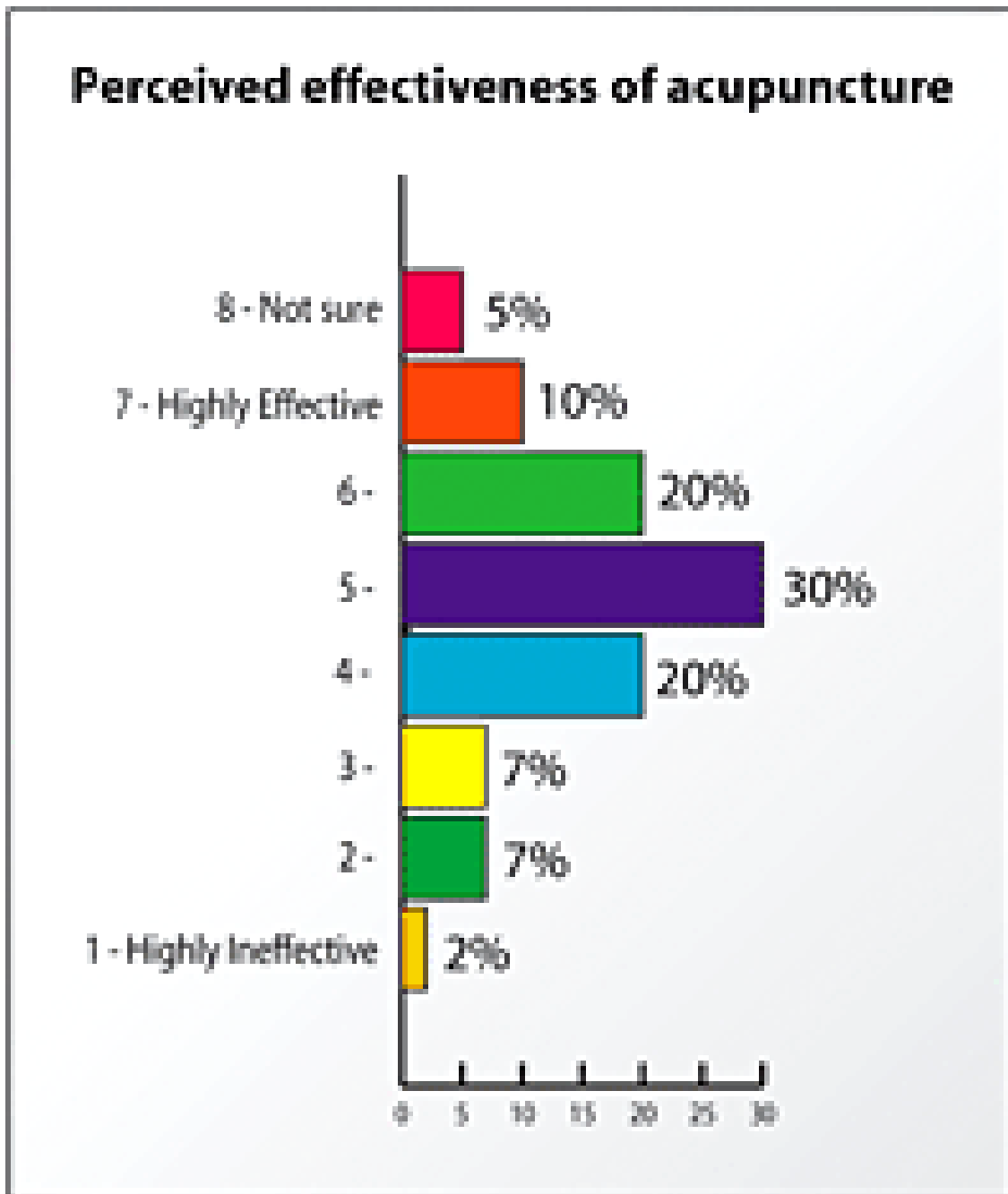


Despite these strong sentiments, most physicians appeared comfortable recommending alternative medicine to their patients. In fact, 65 percent of the respondents reported recommending alternative medicine as a complement to their medical treatment at some time, and when asked "Are there any conditions under which you would advise a patient to use complementary medicine?", 63 percent responded, "Yes."

A majority of physicians also supported federal funding for complementary and alternative medicine research. When asked if the establishment of the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine was a positive or negative development, 53 percent believed it was positive; only 15 percent replied that it was a negative development. Similarly, most physicians (65 percent) felt that the National Institutes of Health should fund CAM research; only 20 percent felt the NIH

should not.

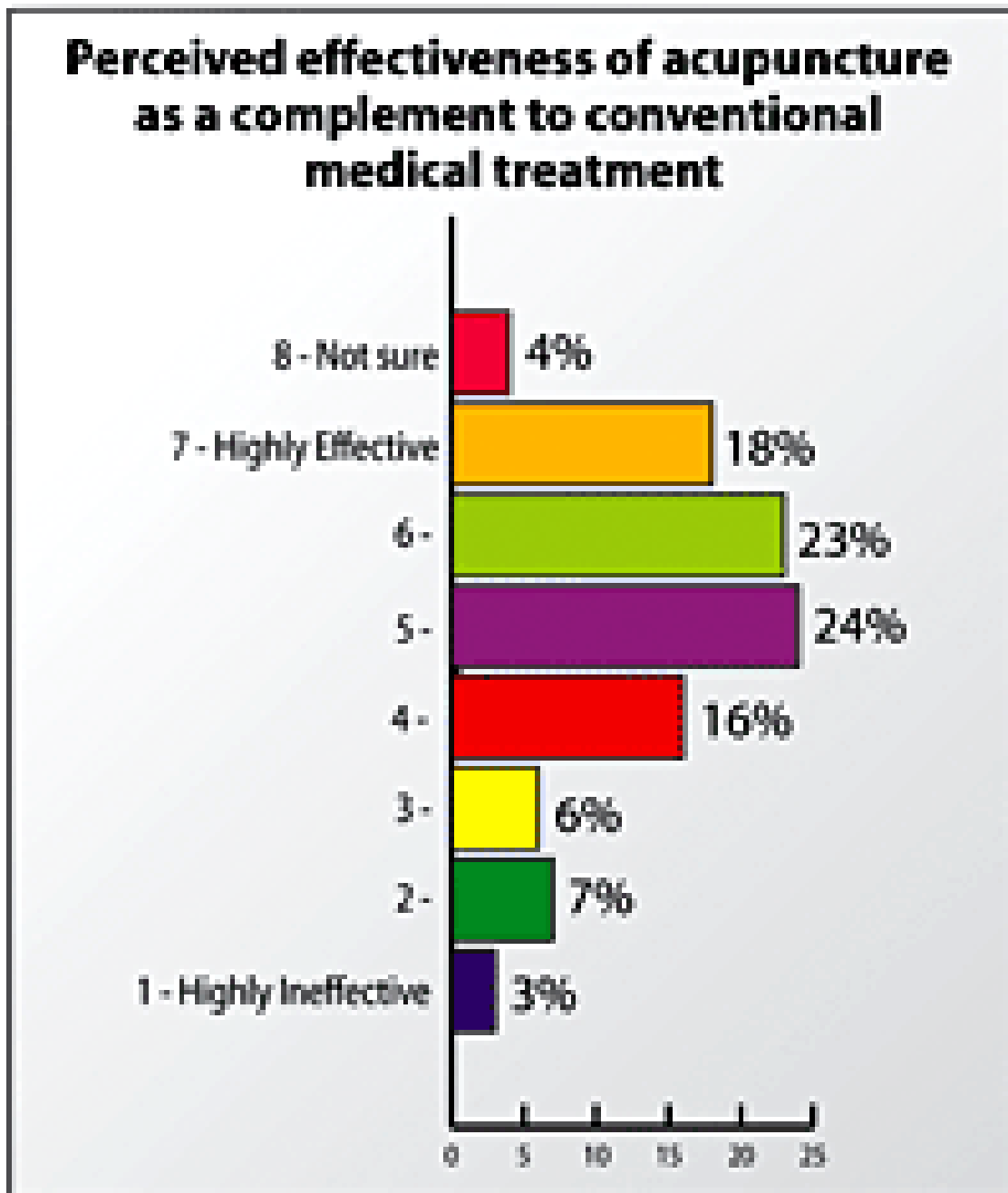
In terms of individual therapies, acupuncture received the highest rating of any CAM therapy in the survey. Sixty percent of those surveyed believed acupuncture to be effective to some extent, including 10 percent who thought it was "highly effective." Massage therapy ranked second at 58 percent, followed by mind-body interventions. Nineteen percent of the respondents thought that traditional Chinese medicine was effective. Aromatherapy ranked last, as only 10 percent of the physicians indicated that they thought it was effective.



When viewed as a complement to conventional medical treatments, acupuncture again received the highest ratings of any form of CAM; 65 percent of the physicians believed it to be an effective complement to some degree. Acupuncture also finished in a tie with hypnosis in terms of being "highly effective," a rating given by 18 percent of the respondents to each therapy. Twenty-three

percent of the physicians saw traditional Chinese medicine as being an effective complement to traditional medical treatments.

In an accompanying press release, executives from The Finkelstein Institute and HCD elaborated on the survey results, and indicated that CAM should not be lumped into one broad category. Rather, each of the therapies that comprise what is considered complementary and alternative medicine - whether they be "useful complements" such as acupuncture, or other modalities that "remain on the fringe" - should be evaluated individually. Ultimately, however, it appears that scientific research and the desire of patients will help determine the future of CAM.



"The one trait that all complementary and alternative therapies share is the fact that they are not conventionally used," observed Glenn Kessler, a co-founder and managing partner at HCD Research. "However, they are not all the same, and as we see in this study, physicians clearly

recognize that each therapy must be judged on its own merits."

"The message here is that techniques, like acupuncture, which have made it into the mainstream, are recognized by physicians as useful complements to scientific medicine," added Dr. Alan Mittleman, director of The Finkelstein Institute. "Other therapies remain on the fringe and are viewed with suspicion. Nonetheless, physicians seem willing to let their patients - and future research - decide what has credibility and what doesn't."

The complete results of the HCD/JTS physician survey on complementary and alternative medicine are available online for all interested parties. To view the survey results, visit www.hcdhealth.com.

Reference

1. Allopathic doctors divided on benefits and advantages of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). NewsTarget press release, Sep. 22, 2005. Available online at www.newstarget.com/011778.html.

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