Conference News: SAR 2017 Meeting

The Society for Acupuncture Research 2017 conference (SAR 2017), co-sponsored by the Department of Anesthesia at Stanford University, titled "Advancing the Precision Medicine Initiative through Acupuncture Research" took place in San Francisco on April 27-29.

Precision Medicine represents a proactive model, brought on by the convergence of systems — biology with advances in health care information, delivery and access, made possible by technology and informatics. The overarching purpose of PM is to transform healthcare to a proactive P4 medicine that is predictive, preventive, personalized and participatory.[1]

PM Initiative

The focus of SAR 2017 was to explore how research on acupuncture and traditional East Asian medicine can contribute to the Precision Medicine Initiative (PMI), a research project launched by President Obama in 2015.

Furthermore, the conference aimed at providing a forum for exchanging ideas emerging from personalized medicine that can help us better explore individual variability and responders/non-responders, which has been a hallmark of clinical and mechanistic acupuncture research studies. The conference program included multiple plenary lectures that directly addressed current basic, clinical, and translational research in acupuncture, addressing very interesting and informative themes.

Panels and Presentations

The conference had several panel discussions including one by Claudia Witt, Lixing Lao and systems biologist Herman A. van Wietmarschen provided an overview of crucial concepts that define PMI, methodological considerations, potential contributions and pitfalls in integrating the individualized TCM pattern differentiation matrix, and examples of this integration.

Ben Kligler and Hugh MacPherson shared their related experiences and perspectives on clinical/policy research on the role of acupuncture in mainstream medicine. Moderated by Janet Kahn, national integrative healthcare policy expert, the next panel explored the role of research in guiding policy and conversely, how policy might influence research. Laura Ocker and Robert Davis, presented on the evolution of health care policy and insurance coverage for acupuncture in the states of Oregon and Vermont, respectively.

The last panel on day two focused on the role of acupuncture in precision medicine treatment of cancer, describing the use of acupuncture at the Integrative Medicine Service at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, presented by Jun Mao, and acupuncture at the Dana Farber Cancer Institute, presented by Weidong Lu. Richard Harris, PhD, presented on his work in managing chronic pain and fatigue in cancer patients.

In addition, presentations of original research, in acupuncture and allied traditional East Asian modalities, including clinical trials, basic science, and research methodology, were presented by

members of the national and international research communities for oral and poster presentations.

All presentations highlighted key areas for different aspects of acupuncture research as well as oral and poster presentations on clinical, mechanistic and methodological topics. During lunch on Friday, Wen Chen facilitated a workshop to highlight the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH) research framework and funding opportunities. Saturday's lunch, featured a group discussion facilitated by SAR board members Ryan Milley and myself, which focused on the topic "Beyond TCM: Personalized Medicine in the Real World of Acupuncture Clinical Practice."

Attendees were encouraged to engage in discussion, exchange ideas and provide input on the potential role of acupuncture (and allied therapies, including herbs) in helping to shape and inform PMI, the key challenges of establishing the evidence base, and the potential opportunities that this initiative may provide to the field.

Scholarships & Awards

SAR granted 27 scholarships for junior researchers and students to attend the conference, and four awards to the best presentations in different categories:

The award winner in the Junior Researcher in Basic Science was Noah Zucker — a medical student at the University of Michigan for his presentation on "Evoked pressure pain sensitivity is associated with differential analgesic response to verum and sham acupuncture in fibromyalgia"; the recipient for the award in the category of Junior Researcher in Clinical Research: was Carolyn Ee with the presentation "Expectancy did not predict treatment outcome in a randomized controlled trial of acupuncture for menopausal hot flushes".

The Senior Researcher in Basic Science award winner was Younbyoung Chae for his presentation on "The pivotal role of pattern identification in characterizing hidden rules linking symptoms and acupoint selection," and the Senior Researcher in the Clinical Research category was Daniel Pach who presented the results of the study "Acupuncture for patients with multiple sclerosis-associated fatigue — a randomized controlled trial."

For more information about SAR please visit: acupunctureresearch.org/. You can follow SAR on Twitter @SAR_acuresearch and #SAR-C2017.

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