

4th Global Acupuncture & Therapists Annual Meeting and International Conference on Holistic Medicine & Holistic Nursing

July 14–16, 2016 Philadelphia, USA

Cost-effects of acupuncture: Where do we stand, where do we go from here?

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The evidence-based medicine (EBM) development that started in the nineties has challenged both conventional medicine and complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) modalities such as acupuncture, to provide clinical research based evidence of quality of healthcare practice (e.g., safety, efficacy and (cost) effectiveness of interventions for specific indications). Whereas the EBM development started to strengthen the autonomy and self-regulation of the medical profession by means of scientific truth-finding and demonstration of transparency and accountability, it more and more has turned into an external control tool of stakeholders (e.g., insurance companies and policy makers), with an industry and university career driven setting of the research agenda, and an overemphasis on following algorithmic rules in medical decision making. As a result, guidelines for clinical practice are developed that ideally include only evidence-based therapeutic interventions, based on the results of systematic reviews and meta-analyses of preferably high quality evidence. The implication of this development is that is increasingly important for CAM modalities such as acupuncture, to provide high quality evidence on (cost) effects for specific indications. In this presentation at first a review of the evidence on cost-effects of acupuncture for specific indications (e.g., seasonal allergic rhinitis, stroke, whiplash, neck pain) will be given. Then an assessment of the quality of the evidence will be presented. Finally a strategy 'where to go from here' will be presented, taken into account at one hand the EBM demands and on the other hand the holistic theoretical background of acupuncture.

Biography

Erik W Baars (MD, MSc Epidemiology, PhD) is a Senior Researcher Healthcare (Louis Bolk Institute) and a Professor of Anthroposophic Medicine (University of Applied Sciences, Leiden, The Netherlands). His research interests include clinical studies, health promotion, holism-reductionism, integrative medicine, concept and methodology development. He published 205 papers, articles, book chapters and monographs and received the "Excellence in Integrative Medicine Research Award" (category 'clinical research') provided by the European Society of Integrative Medicine for the article 'Patients whose GP knows complementary medicine tend to have lower costs and live longer' in the *European Journal of Health Economics* (Kooreman & Baars, 2011).

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