



## Acupuncture proven to go beyond placebo effect 02.05.2005

Brain scanning techniques were used to demonstrate acupuncture's impact is more than just a placebo by researchers at the University of Southampton and UCL.

The results showed that real acupuncture elicits a demonstrable physiological response in the brain distinctly different from that occurring when the patient has an expectation or belief in the treatment.

The researchers used a very sophisticated form of brain scanning called Positron Emission Tomography (PET) to find out what took place in patients' brains when they had acupuncture.

The patients, all suffering from painful osteo-arthritis, were divided into three groups:

- \* One group were touched with blunt needles, with the participants being aware that this had no therapeutic value and that the needles would not pierce the skin. The parts of their brain linked to the sensation of touch were activated.
- \* The second group were treated with special needles which only 'appeared' to pierce the skin. These needles functioned like 'stage daggers' with the tip of the needle retracting up into the handle on 'insertion'. This group of patients believed that the treatment was real and the brain scans showed that an area of the brain associated with pain relief was activated. This part of the brain is linked to the production of natural pain killers (opiates).
- \* The third group of patients received 'real' acupuncture. The area associated with opiate generation was activated but in addition, the ipsilateral insular cortex was also activated. This is a part of the brain thought to be involved with pain modulation and is a pathway associated with acupuncture.

The British Acupuncture Council comments "This is very positive news for acupuncture and this latest research is an exciting illustration of what acupuncturists have known for a long time - that acupuncture works and its effectiveness goes beyond the placebo effect. The British Acupuncture Council looks forward to further research into acupuncture and the treatment protocols carried out by our members. "



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The British Acupuncture Council welcomes research to demonstrate the value of acupuncture when the studies are properly designed and executed.

(About the research: the paper 'Expectancy and belief modulate the neuronal substrates of pain treated by acupuncture' appears in the Vol 25 Issue 4 of NeuroImage published on 1 May 2005 (pp 1161 - 1167). The authors are Jérémie Pariente, Peter White, Richard S.J. Frackowiak, and George Lewith.)

<http://www.acupuncture.org.uk/content/news/news.asp?id=43>



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