

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

Media Contact: Ann Harrell
214-648-3404
ann.harrell@utsouthwestern.edu

UT SOUTHWESTERN RESEARCHER INVESTIGATES ACUPUNCTURE FOR TREATMENT OF PATIENTS WITH BIPOLAR DISORDER

DALLAS – Dec. 6, 2001 – Dr. Tricia Suppes has long been concerned about the 1.9 million Americans with bipolar disorder, also known as manic-depressive illness. That's why she's investigating a new use for an old therapy: acupuncture.

"Bipolar disorder is a common, severe and persistent mental illness that – without effective treatment – disrupts the lives of patients and their families," said Suppes, associate professor of psychiatry at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas. "If the treatment is inadequate and the patient does not respond well to currently available drugs, the disease may lead to loss of jobs, marriages and even lives. The need for new treatments is critical."

Suppes is currently enrolling patients 18 to 65 years old who are in the depressed stage of bipolar disorder. In this disorder, patients cycle between depression and elation, extreme irritation or anger.

The study, funded by the National Institute of Mental Health, is the first to evaluate acupuncture as an adjunct to medication for treatment of bipolar illness although an earlier published study at the University of Arizona College of Medicine reported positive results on the use of acupuncture as a treatment for major, or unipolar, depression. Suppes wants to learn whether supplementing bipolar patients' medications with acupuncture will allow some to reduce their medication.

Current psychotropic medications for bipolar disorder do not work well for many patients. Suppes said some must take a combination of medications daily that can cause significant side effects and can be costly for patients without insurance. That often causes patients to discontinue their medication, she said.

The study will involve 30 male and female patients randomly divided into two groups. Some will receive acupuncture directed toward treating depressive symptoms. Others will receive nonspecific acupuncture, which treats certain physical complaints. Patients, who will

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continue on their regular medications during the trial, will not know which type of acupuncture they are receiving. All will be treated free for eight weeks. The patients receiving nonspecific acupuncture will be offered acupuncture specifically intended for depression at the conclusion of the trial.

For further information about the study, call the Bipolar Disorder Clinic and Research Program at 214-648-7474.

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