

# Acupuncture in major depressive disorder: a scoping review of clinical practice guidelines

Fernandez-Chinguel JE<sup>1</sup>, Goicochea-Lugo S<sup>2</sup>, Villarreal-Zegarra D<sup>3</sup>, Taype-Rondan A<sup>4</sup>, Zafra-Tanaka JH<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universidad de San Martín de Porres, Chiclayo, Perú

<sup>2</sup> Instituto de Evaluación de Tecnologías en Salud e Investigación, EsSalud, Lima, Perú

<sup>3</sup> Instituto Peruano de Orientación Psicológica, Lima, Perú

<sup>4</sup> Universidad San Ignacio de Loyola, Unidad de Investigación para la Generación y Síntesis de Evidencias en Salud, Lima, Perú

<sup>5</sup> Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia, CRONICAS Center of Excellence in Chronic Diseases, Lima, Perú

**Background:** Acupuncture is a commonly used approach to treat depression. However, recommendations regarding acupuncture issued by clinical practice guidelines (CPG) vary widely.

**Objective:** To describe the recommendations regarding acupuncture in CPGs for depression in adults and to assess the methodology used to reach them.

**Methods:** First, we performed a scoping review of CPGs for depression management in adults. We reviewed CPGs that performed systematic reviews (SRs) published between January 2014 to May 2018 and that answered the review question. Later, we selected and evaluated de CPGs that included the use of acupuncture for the treatment of depression. We assessed the SRs quality using the “A MeaSurement Tool to Asses Systematic Review-2” and described how the recommendation regarding acupuncture was reached.

**Table 1. Evidence in which the acupuncture recommendations were based in each of the assessed CPGs.**

Characteristics	CANMAT 2016	DGDG 2015	APA 2010 (reaffirmed 2015)	ACP 2016	VA/DoD 2016
Date of last search update	December 2015	Not mentioned	May 09	September 2015	April 2015
<b>SRs cited:</b>					
Gartlehner 2016				X	
Chan 2015	X				X
Sorbero 2015					X
Zhang 2014					X
Wu 2012	X				
Smith 2010	X				
Zhang 2010	X				
Fan 2010					X
Wang 2008			X		
<b>RCTs cited:</b>					
Sun 2013				X	
Qu 2013				X	
MacPherson 2013	X				
Quah-Smith 2013	X				
Zhang 2009				X	
Allen 2006			X		
Huang 2005				X	
Luo 1998			X		
Allen 1998			X		

**CANMAT:** Canadian Network for Mood and Anxiety Treatments

**DGDG:** CPG from the Depression Guideline Development Group Sponsored by Traditional Medicine Office, Western Pacific Region, World Health Organization

**APA:** American Psychiatric Association

**ACP:** American College of Physicians

**VA/DoD:** Management of Major Depressive Disorder Working Group

**SR:** Systematic Reviews

**RCT:** randomized controlled trial

## Results:

■ We found five CPGs that fulfilled our inclusion criteria: three from the US, one from Canada and one from China (Figure 1).

■ Four CPGs fulfilled between two and three items of AMSTAR-2 and one CPG fulfilled seven items.

■ The methodology used to reach recommendations varied between CPGs (Figure 1).

■ Regarding acupuncture use recommendation, we found that two of them did not formulate any, two were on favor and one was against its recommendation (Figure 1).

■ About the acupuncture question, none of the CPGs listed the studies in which their decision was based on for the acupuncture question. Moreover, CPGs cited different studies in the justification of their recommendation (Table 1)

**Conclusions:** CPGs issue heterogeneous recommendations regarding the usage of acupuncture as a treatment for depression. The lack of a clearly stated review question presented in the majority of guidelines prevents the reader from understanding what the developing group was trying to answer. Moreover, the arguments presented to support a decision are usually not clearly stated. Therefore, the assessment of the recommendations becomes extremely difficult.

## Patient or healthcare consumer involvement:

This study is of interest to decision makers who could better understand how the recommendations are issued and therefore decide which CPG to follow.

**Figure 1. Clinical Practice Guidelines recommendations for the treatment of major depression with acupuncture**

Clinical Practice Guidelines (year/country):	CANMAT (2016/CANADA)	DGDG (2015/CHINA)	APA (2010/USA)	ACP (2016/USA)	VA/DoD (2016/USA)
Evidence in which the acupuncture recommendations were based:	4SRs & 2RCTs	Not identifiable	1SRs & 3RCTs	1SRs & 5RCTs	4SRs
Methodology used to reach the recommendations:	CANMAT	GRADE	EXPERT CONSENSUS	EXPERT CONSENSUS	EXPERT CONSENSUS
Recommendation regarding acupuncture:	IN FAVOR	IN FAVOR	AGAINST	NONE	NONE

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**SRs:** Systematic Reviews

**RCTs:** Randomized Clinical Trials



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**Contact person:**

Jose Ernesto Fernandez Chinguel

ernestofc932@gmail.com