

## **Arthritis patients discover that acupuncture really has a point**

Jacqueline Maley – Sydney Morning Herald

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Patients are not imagining it – acupuncture does actually reduce pain and help joint mobility, a US study has shown.

The trouble is, doctors are not exactly sure why.

In the largest study of its kind, American researchers took 570 patients in Maryland and New York and put them in three groups.

One group was given 26 weeks of gradually tapered acupuncture treatment. The second group was given sham acupuncture treatment, where the patients' legs were hidden from view and practitioner taped needles to their knees without inserting them. In a third control group, patients were given education sessions on self-managing arthritis.

The group receiving real acupuncture treatment reported a 40 per cent reduction in pain and an almost 40 per cent improvement in joint function. Significantly more patients receiving real acupuncture reported feeling better overall after the 26-week treatment. Leo Pinczewski, an orthopaedic surgeon at the North Sydney Orthopaedic and Sports Medicine Centre, said acupuncture was still used as an anaesthetic in China.

"Although the mechanism of action of acupuncture is not understood by the scientific community, it's well-accepted that it does have an effect in pain," he said.

Graeme Jones, the medical director of Arthritis Australia, said acupuncture could be useful as an "adjunct therapy" in treating osteo-arthritis.

"Acupuncture can have a modest but significant effect," he said. "I have no hesitation in recommending it, but I wouldn't go so far as recommending Medicare sponsor it."

Judy James, chief executive of the Australian Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Association, said the study confirmed what acupuncturists already knew.

"[Osteo-arthritis] is one of the conditions that the World Health Organisation has recognised since 1979 as suitable for acupuncture," she said.