

It may have been around for thousands of years, but there are few 'alternative' medicines that rouse as much controversy as acupuncture. In fact, just the very act of putting the 'alternative' in inverted commas, seems to convey a lack of belief bordering on the pejorative. So, what is the truth? Well, in short, it depends upon who you want to listen to- and who you want to believe- and when.

While many of us have known friends or family members who have experienced miraculous cures for lower back pain, or given up the dreaded tobacco weed by merely stroking that cunningly-placed needle in an ear lobe, we probably know just as many people for whom acupuncture treatment has conspicuously failed. However, there is no doubt that the practice is undergoing a complete metamorphosis from fringe to main-steam.

Currently, over 70% of chiropractic state boards in the US regulate acupuncture practitioners. The pressure is certainly on for that figure to hit 100% in the near future, as the industry lobby grows in power and effectiveness and patients demand access to a full suite of health services. Of course, as many embrace the theory of more natural health remedies, along with the move away from use of prescription drugs, less-invasive forms of treatment were always going to flourish in the slip-stream of the latest life-style choice.

However, there could be more to it than that. A recent study, which examined the findings of 29 Randomized Controlled Trials found that, even after eliminating any placebo affect, acupuncture definitely reduced the pain in chronic pain sufferers. The authors of the study even came down on the side of acupuncture as being a legitimate medical option for pain relief. Now, we should be aware that the level of relief was pretty modest and that it was not compared with other legitimate methods of pain relief. Of course, another consideration will always be costs involved. How does an hour with an acupuncturist compare with popping a couple of Advil and which is the most effective- and cost-effective?

So, perhaps acupuncture, and its efficacy, is more about one's own belief system than that of the medical establishment, or the opinions of state boards or a fancy magazine ad. Perhaps a distrust of Big Pharma will encourage the more adventurous to explore other options. Perhaps the desire for a cleaner, less-cluttered, way of life will deliver a new form of medicine. Perhaps acupuncture just works. Perhaps.