Standards to improve the reporting of clinical trials in acupuncture

Sally Hopewell

Transparent and clear reporting of research is important to enable readers to understand how a trial is conducted and to assess the validity and reliability of the trial findings. Failure to adequately report research findings distorts the reality of how the research was conducted, it prevents clinicians from applying effective interventions and it results in considerable amounts of money invested in health research being wasted.1

This issue of Acupuncture in Medicine sees the publication of a new extension to the Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials (CONSORT) Statement for reporting clinical trials of acupuncture (see page 83).2 The Standards for Reporting Interventions in Clinical Trials of Acupuncture (STRICTA) guidelines, first published in 2001, are designed to improve the completeness and transparency of reporting interventions in trials of acupuncture. It aims to ensure that acupuncture trials are more accurately interpreted and more easily replicated. Since their publication in 2001, the STRICTA guidelines have been endorsed by six leading acupuncture journals (http://www.stricta.info, accessed 16 April 2010).

This revision to the STRICTA guidelines is the result of close collaboration between the STRICTA Group, CONSORT Group and the Chinese Cochrane Centre. The revised guidelines have been developed after consultation with an expert panel that provided feedback on the revised checklist, and a subsequent face-to-face meeting in Freiburg in October 2008 of 21 participants, involving members of the STRICTA and CONSORT Groups and Chinese Cochrane Centre. The STRICTA checklist consists of six items split into 17 subitems. These items include details of the rationale for acupuncture, details of needling, treatment regimen, other components of treatment, the practitioner background and the control or comparator intervention. The STRICTA guidelines published in this issue of Acupuncture in Medicine describe each checklist item and their subitems.2 They provide a detailed explanation of the need for their adequate reporting and practical examples of good reporting from the published literature. A more detailed description of the process of revising the STRICTA guidelines has been published elsewhere.3

Importantly, the new STRICTA guidelines have been developed alongside the newly updated version of the CONSORT statement.45 While items from the STRICTA checklist relate specifically to the reporting of acupuncture trials, other items relating to the design, analysis and interpretation of clinical trials are also important. As such, the new STRICTA checklist is presented within the framework of the newly revised CONSORT checklist4 5 and CONSORT extension for reporting non-pharmacological interventions.5 This combined framework should hopefully enable users to see more clearly which items they should report at each stage of the trial publication.

Another important change to the STRICTA guidelines is the acknowledgement that while STRICTA should continue to function as a stand-alone guideline for acupuncture trials, the checklist might also be applicable for reporting a broad range of clinical evaluation designs such as uncontrolled studies and case reports describing acupuncture treatments.

In this case, it may be important for the users of the STRICTA guidelines to also consult additional reporting guidelines such as Strengthening the Reporting of Observational Studies in Epidemiology (STROBE) statement for the reporting observational studies.7 These reporting guidelines can be found on the Enhancing the QUAlity and Transparency Of health Research (EQUATOR) Library for Health Research Reporting provided freely online (http://www.equator-network.org, accessed 16 April 2010). The EQUATOR Network is an international initiative that seeks to improve the reliability and value of the medical research literature by promoting transparent and accurate reporting of research studies.

Since its publication in 1996, CONSORT has been supported by more than 400 journals and several editorial groups, such as the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors. While the principal objective of CONSORT is to provide guidance to authors about how to improve the reporting of their trials, readers, peer reviewers and editors also use CONSORT to help them critically appraise and interpret reports of randomised trials. Studies assessing the impact of CONSORT have shown that journal adoption of the CONSORT statement is associated with improved reporting of randomised trials.8 It is hoped that the publication of the new STRICTA guidelines will see a similar impact on the reporting of clinical trials within the field of acupuncture.

Provenance and peer review Commissioned; internally peer reviewed.

Competing interests None.


doi:10.1136/aim.2010.002311

REFERENCES


Correspondence to Dr Sally Hopewell, Centre for Statistics in Medicine, University of Oxford, Wolfson College, Linton Road, Oxford OX2 6UD, UK; sally.hopewell@cs.m.ox.ac.uk
Standards to improve the reporting of clinical trials in acupuncture

Sally Hopewell

_Acupunct Med_ 2010 28: 63
doi: 10.1136/aim.2010.002311

Updated information and services can be found at:
_http://aim.bmj.com/content/28/2/63_

These include:

**References**
This article cites 8 articles, 1 of which you can access for free at:
_http://aim.bmj.com/content/28/2/63#BIBL_

**Email alerting service**
Receive free email alerts when new articles cite this article. Sign up in the box at the top right corner of the online article.

Notes

To request permissions go to:
_http://group.bmj.com/group/rights-licensing/permissions_

To order reprints go to:
_http://journals.bmj.com/cgi/reprintform_

To subscribe to BMJ go to:
_http://group.bmj.com/subscribe/_