

# Acupuncture practice as a preventive measure in primary care: instrument for mediation of care in times of COVID-19 in occupational health

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### **ABSTRACT**

The pandemic situation caused by COVID-19 (CoronaVirus Disease 2019) has stimulated

discussions on ways to end health practices. Traditional Chinese Medicine is inserted and composes the set of therapies recommended by the World Health Organization. This abstract reports on the use of acupuncture in a preventive way in the benefit of the health worker. This is an experience report with the applicability of acupuncture in workers of the Primary Health Care Service in the united State of Porto Belo in the State of Santa Catarina (Brazil) during the confrontation with COVID-19. Care was performed with employees who sought care in 07 basic health units in the municipality. The practice aimed to contribute to the improvement of physical and emotional symptoms, health promotion and increased willingness to work. The results showed a favorable context for the increase of the technique and the use of the benefits in improving the health conditions of the professionals attended. Reducing levels of anxiety, depression, stress and pain complaints during the period. It was concluded that acupuncture was perceived as beneficial among the servers with good acceptance and demand during the pandemic period.

**Keywords:** Acupuncture, Primary Health Care, Health Occupational Therapy

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The global impact of COVID-19 was profound and a threat to public health (Ferguson et al, 2020). Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is an acute, highly contagious and high mortality rate infectious respiratory disease. It becomes a primary health problem that affects the global economy and social behavior (Nurwati; Huda, 2021). The severity of COVID-19 infection can range from asymptomatic infection to critical disease (Wen et al, 2020).

Acupuncture is a complementary intervention with simple, safe and low cost procedure. Acupuncture can improve the immune system, minimize inflammatory response and control risk factors and comorbidities in COVID-19 (Nurwati; Huda, 2021). It is a non-pharmacological treatment option for several different diseases and symptoms.

The primary proponent of whether acupuncture should or should not be recommended is the desire to seek acupuncture therapy by the patient (Van Hal; Dydyk; Green, 2018). Under this ideology, health is not simply the absence of disease, but rather the functional interconnection of well-being. There are no

isolated symptoms, but each symptom arises against the context of individual-specific blockage or excess (Van Hal; Dydyk; Green, 2018).

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is effective in preventing COVID-19 with clinical evidence (Zhao et al, 2021). According to Luo et al, (2021) potentially promising ERM interventions have been identified and deserve further evaluation to establish their evidence base, particularly in populations outside China.

In the Brazilian Unified Health System (SUS), Complementary and Integrative Traditional Medicines (MTCI) are called Integrative and Complementary Practices (PIC's). These gained visibility and growth after the promulgation of the National Policy of Integrative and Complementary Practices (PNPIC), which made five PIC official in the SUS: homeopathy, acupuncture/traditional Chinese medicine, anthroposophical medicine, medicinal plants and thermal/mineral waters (Brazil, 2006). After this period there was an expansion of the offer and methods recognized as practices. The objective of this study was to describe the use of acupuncture in a preventive way in the benefit of the worker in primary health care.

## **2 METHODS**

This is an experience report with the applicability of acupuncture in workers of the Primary Health Care Service in the municipality of Porto Belo in the Estado of Santa Catarina (Brazil), during the confrontation with COVID-19 in the pandemic period. Acupuncture was performed in 26 workers in 07 Health Centers. The workers sought spontaneously the sessions of the cupuntura or by indication of other employees.

## **3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The SUS is one of the largest and complex public health systems in the world, covering several levels of care, thus ensuring full, universal and free access for the entire population, naturalized or not in Brazil. One of the components that gains prominence of this system is to provide comprehensive health care, covering not only care, but also the provision of services for the prevention of diseases and diseases and health promotion, with a view to meeting the demands of the population and improving the quality of life in the individual and collective sphere (Brazil, 1990).

Primary Health Care (PHC) is considered as ordering health care, inserted in a polyarchic model, together with the secondary network and terciaria services. This level of care has the ability to respond continuously, systematizedly and equitably, to most health needs in the individual and collective sphere, in addition to covering the promotion and protection of health, the prevention of injuries, diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation, harm reduction and maintenance of health, providing comprehensive care (Cabral et al, 2020).

Brazil is committed to a new proposal for epidemiological surveillance aimed at human infection by SARS-CoV-2 (ICD 10: U07.1 - respiratory infection by the new coronavirus), supported by the

consolidation of WHO information and new technical and scientific evidence. Starting from the premise that the disease is a respiratory infection, the states, Distrito Federal and municipalities begin their lines of control, prevention and treatment based on plans for the influenza pandemic and respiratory syndromes, provided for in the Epidemiological Surveillance Guide (VE) and technical manuals for the coordination of epidemiological events in bulk, based on the capacity and experience of the SUS in the face of the response to combat the new coronavirus (Brazil, 2020).

The gravity of COVID-19 infection can range from asymptomatic infection to critical disease (Wen et al, 2020). Acupuncture is a therapy with considerable potential. As there is limited evidence for individual therapies and no singular treatment for COVID-19, the guidelines endorse a multidisciplinary approach (Trager et al, 2022). Integrative and Complementary Health Practices (PIC's) are therapeutic practices recognized by the World Health Organization and encompass several body and behavioral practices, one of which is acupuncture, which enables an expansion in the reception of users' demands, with closer ties between the health team, contributing to the demedicalization of care and the expansion of the clinic's offer in PHC (by Gouveia Oliveira; Pezzato; Mendes, 2022).

The State of Santa Catarina prepared a technical note, Technical Note No. 10/2020 – DAPS/SPS/SES, to guide health professionals in the use of integrative and complementary practices during the COVID pandemic period. This technical note took into account the current situation in relation to the Coronavirus pandemic (COVID 19) and the recommendations issued by the Center for Operations and Emergency in Health (COES), as well as the emergency declared throughout the territory of Santa Catarina (Decree No. 515/2020), for the purpose of prevention and confrontation of COVID-19. Also, the National Policy of Integrative and Complementary Health Practices was based on the insertion of integrative practices (BRASIL, 2017) and State Law 17,706 of January 22, 2019, which support the insertion of integrative and complementary practices in the State of Santa Catarina to serve as a strategy for disease prevention, promotion and health treatment in the context of primary health care (Gouveia, 2022).

This technical document recommended among other guidelines:

- That integrative and complementary practices in health (PIC) be carried out in a complementary, individualized and weighted case-by-case way for the prevention of health problems, health promotion and recovery, and may compute health care strategies for health workers and citizens in coping with COVID-19, in the case of primary health care;

- That the use of PICs be suggested by health professionals to promote mental and emotional balance, relieve mild respiratory symptoms, strengthen the body's immune function and help in the recovery of the citizen after infectious diseases;

- That the records of the activities be recorded in the electronic medical records of the citizen (PEC) of the e-SUS-APS and/or information system used by the municipality for the effective insertion of PICs in the network. The importance of recording the clinical evolution of users in relation to PICs was also emphasized for the purpose of monitoring and evaluating user satisfaction. It suggested monitoring and

evaluating the results of the insertion of PICs in the municipality through the analysis of indicators constructed by municipal management. These indicators contained factors such as medication consumption, hospitalization index, quality of life index, through validated and recognized methodologies to evaluate the insertion of integrative practices in the SUS.

The uncertainty and uncomfortable anxieties caused and its side effects at work have not disappeared and the psychological impact of the pandemic has become even more apparent with coronavirus. The pandemic has damaged many health systems and created unprecedented pressure on the psychological and physical aspects of the lives of a thousand people worldwide (Li; Yue; Crabbe, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on the health of professionals who did the front line and was no different with health workers in primary care, the main gateway to the Brazilian health system. The rapid spread of the virus becomes worrisome for PHC services. There were changes in the routine of work caused by the pandemic, the interruption of the provision of the service to the population due to infection, cases of deaths and the feelings that were in health professionals (Pereira et al, 2022). . Thus, care strategies were proposed to cope with COVID-19 that covered users and professionals of health.

We performed 92 visits with 26 employees who sought care in 07 basic health units in the municipality. Acupuncture sessions were conducted according to specific protocols of the Chinese energy area and physiology. The practice aimed to contribute to the improvement of physical and emotional symptoms, health promotion and increased willingness to work.

Acupuncture can be of high translational value to allow new therapies directed to COVID-19 (Huang et al, 2022). Australian nurses experienced high levels of anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic. In a study using acupuncture and music therapy techniques, they presented considerations with the mental health of nurses (Wang et al, 2022).

The experimentation of this practice was also thought of as a pilot for the creation of a worker care service. The results showed a favorable context for the increase of the technique and the use of the benefits in improving the health conditions of the professionals attended. Reducing levels of anxiety, depression, stress and reduction of pain complaints during the application period. Having the potential to contribute to the improvement of physical and psychoemotional situations. The insertion of integrative and complementary practices in health care for health workers and citizens is a promising strategy to be encouraged by managers to provide the offer of new innovative and humanized therapeutic options (Gouveia, 2022).

TCM can effectively prevent the disease from turning into severe and critical illness. Possesses characteristics itself strengthening the body's resistance to eliminate pathogenic factors. COVID-19 showed that early TCM intervention is an important way to improve the cure rate, shorten the course of the disease, slow disease progression, and reduce the mortality rate. In addition, prevention and control fully reflect the ideology of "preventive treatment of the disease" (Ren; Zhang; Wang, 2022).

#### **4 CONCLUSION**

It was concluded that acupuncture was perceived as beneficial among the servers with good acceptance and demand during the pandemic period. With the capacity to provide workers' health promotion, active relationships between the technique and other integrative interventions in Primary Care. The technique was recognized as a complementary treatment in the prevention of COVID-19, but more research is needed to combine the effectiveness of preventive ly in the health of the worker.

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