



The Association of Traditional Chinese Medicine and Acupuncture UK

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Dear Colleagues,

Re: A Letter from the ATCM to All Members on the publication of the NICE Guideline on Lower Back Pain

NICE has published the final version of the guidelines on lower back pain, and despite broad criticising feedback to them by various professional bodies (more than 70% comments disagree about the decision on acupuncture), and our expression of supporting the clinical efficiency of acupuncture, they maintained their decision saying "Do not offer acupuncture for managing lower back pain with or without sciatica."

This is a U-turn from their previous guideline published in 2009 that recommended acupuncture. ATCM consider that the change is not made purely on evidence base; rather it is for the budget control of the troubled NHS. The denial of the clinical effectiveness of acupuncture in treating lower back pain is not justified in the virtue of science nor social care.

We share the broad view of acupuncture professionals that the committee made factual errors again in the judgement on the clinical effect of acupuncture, which lead to their wrong conclusion on acupuncture. The main reason for such an error laden conclusion is about sham needling and the placebo effect. ATCM representatives have repeatedly pointed out in various occasions that the so called "sham needling" is not a clinically inert intervention, but a proven clinical encounter that has been studied and proved to be clinically effective in therapies of touching, taping and others.

We also found out that *talking therapy* is among the recommended list of therapies, which is probably more of a placebo related therapy. While acupuncture was concluded to show no real difference between placebo and real improvement, we could not find evidence that talking is producing biological changes. The inclusion of talking therapy is evident that double standards are used in their judgement.

It is also worthy to point out that although acupuncture has been used in the NHS for more than 7 years, there is no internal audit about the use of acupuncture and its clinical effectiveness

mentioned in their report. We strongly believe that this part is omitted or neglected with bias.

Our practitioners are receiving feedback from our patients on a daily basis, and the vast majority of the feedback is reporting that acupuncture works effectively for those that suffer from chronic lower back pain. Over a thousand testimonies were collected in a short space of time in order to support our practice after the draft guidelines were released for comment. We believe that the clinical treatment results achieved by our members are of extreme value and it is the clinical achievement that drives the public to our practice, seeking relief of their lower back pain.

We would not be deterred by these guidelines, and our patients know better on how good acupuncture in treating lower back pain is. We will coordinate our research and academic resources to support the clinical research in the area, and therefore to support our practice, and this is depicted in our strategy under the leadership of the new council.

For more evidence of acupuncture treating lower back pain, please visit our website, and we believe that this will help to convince our patients and answer the enquiry from general public.

Chinese medicine in the UK is based on the recognition of our patients, not on the recommendation of the Government or NHS. We believe that our contribution to the health of the public is not recognised and was treated poorly from authoritative bodies. There is a long way to go to get the authority to formally recognise our contribution, and that requires us to unite our professional bodies to produce a stronger voice.

For any further information on this issue, please do not hesitate to contact one of us - We would like to hear your comments and advice on how we can build up our strength in winning the confidence of the public. We believe that is a challenge, but might be a chance of bigger change with opportunity ahead.

Prof. Shulan Tang, ATCM President

Ms. Liqin Zhao, ATCM Vice President

Mr. Fanyi Meng, ATCM General Secretary