Reviewer’s report

Title: Acupuncture treatment as experienced by women with polycystic ovary syndrome: a qualitative study

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Reviewer: Terje Alraek

Reviewer's report:

Dear authors

Your paper is an important contribution to the increasing numbers of qualitative studies describing patient’s experiences of health changes after acupuncture treatment.

I have several comments and questions, some of them are only thought of as ‘food for thought’:

Patients:

You have selected eight women from a material of 84 women (the RCT study) – the rationale for choosing those eight?

Since you are only giving six out of eight occupations, what with the last two ones?

Please describe the reason for waiting up to 4-12 months before you made the interviews (it’s a long time after the last treatment, recall bias?)

You write that the trial is registered at ClinicalTrials.gov NCT00484705, that is the same number as for your RCT – did you apply/registered for the qualitative study at the same time?

Where did the interviews take place? Hospital setting? Did you have a ‘observer’ during the interviews, that is common to have someone observe the ‘unspoken words’ or body language of the participants during the interviews. If not, why?

Data collection:

It is common to describe the interviews also in terms like semi-structured or in-depth, or as unstructured. Where will you place your interviews?

Analysis:

Since you refer to Malteruds modification of Giorgi’s phenomenological research method, I think you shall describe more the analysis process related to the detextualisation/abstracting the contents of the individual meaning units

Results:
I find your first sentence under the results heading a bit challenging I quote: “When asked to relate their experiences of acupuncture, informants’ spoke of them in relation to the diagnosis of PCOS” – You had an open interview technique (page 3/data collection): “Please tell me about your experience of acupuncture treatment?” - I wonder how did you invite them to only speak about their experience related to the diagnosis of PCOS? Or did you exclude them during reading your material, that’s the impression I have reading your first paragraph on page 9.

In one way I find that excluding the other experiences you are more confirming your results from your RCT in the present qualitative study. A strength to qualitative studies is that it can generate new hypotheses and allow for outliers to have their ‘voice’ heard. Could you please in a sentence give the rationale for leaving out the other experiences?

You have given five categories reflecting the experiences. “Getting results”, nr two (page 4) – has been changed into a heading of “Acupuncture triggered things in my body” – while you refer again to “Getting results” in the discussion.

Discussion:

One way of increasing validity in qualitative studies is allowing to the participants read their stories as it is presented in the article. Did you consider that?

The authors are a well-known researcher in PCOS. Are the results from the present qualitative study in any way surprising to you. Or did they confirm the result from your RCT? Or?

When you are discussing the transferability from your sample size (last paragraph page 8), you seem to me to be discussing this in a very quantitative way……..which is not interesting in this context. Isn’t the age span you have 23-38 relevant for the “PCOS age”? In your RCT you have age span of 18-37; so you didn’t invite the ‘young ones’ to this qualitative study?

Did it occur through your analysis that the two of you hold different position and perspectives? Different ways of approaching the same subject may result in an increased understanding of complex phenomena (?)

Maybe you shall throughout the article make clear that you have used electro acupuncture as treatment?

I know that you have not looked into the therapist/patient interaction, however do you think that your findings with regard to hope might have been influenced by the therapist?

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests
Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests