Reviewer's report

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

Version: 1 Date: 26 February 2012

Reviewer: Caroline A Smith

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review this paper. This is an interesting study exploring women’s experiences of acupuncture to treat PCOS.

The research question has been broadly stated and it’s relevance to clinical practice made explicit in the introduction. The study methodology is described and justified although the reporting of the methods could be more transparent.

Compulsory revisions

Methods
1. Please describe the justification for including 8 participants. Is this number sufficient to fully answer your question in relation to the proposed method of analysis.
2. Please provide more detail on how the sample was selected, how many women were invited to participate, was it purposively undertaken, or were they volunteers? It is unclear if some women declined and why, could there be a selection bias?
3. Who conducted the recruitment? Please describe the setting.
4. In the description of the methods: please revise patients to participants throughout text.
5. From the information given on page 3, the question asked appeared to focus on one particular aspect of having acupuncture- how did that feel. The responses reported indicated a greater depth of material gathered. Was there only one major category of questions asked?
6. Characteristics of the study group. Are there any PCOS characteristics, or experience of conventional treatment that you can report on here to describe this population more comprehensively?
7. Was the interview audio recorded? Was data de-identified?
8. Were the scripts read by researcher only. If yes please discuss the limitations of this in the discussion.

Results
1. It is unclear from the results to get a sense of how widely some of the themes were to the sample. Maybe consider use of some,.................. several women...
2. Page 5. Not all patients noticed great results in relation to health status.
Please provide more information on how many.

3. Page 6, text indicates participants had various expectations. Can make it clear in methods this was a question explored in the interview. Would also help to have a sense of common participants expectations were.

Discretionary revisions

Introduction

1. The results indicate participants were inspired to make changes. In some international settings PCOS guidelines strongly recommend engagement in lifestyle (diet and exercise). Please consider making reference to this, as this point might be discussed further in discussion.

Discussion

1. Page 8 re study method, second sentence however, life-world...........................the meaning is unclear. It maybe clearer to the reader if you re-organise material and describe the text as strengths and limitations, it switches around a fair bit.

2. Please consider the role of the researcher and if there are any potential biases introduced.

3. A point of clarification, my reading of the this section is that the interviewer attempted to engage the participant in a conversation about the experience of acupuncture ie needling, and relaxation, this wasn’t what participants spoke about. Is this correct.? Meaning of the last sentence (discussion of results) particularly in relation to the fact that the informants were diagnosed with PCOS is unclear.

4. The finding that acupuncture may empower women to take responsibility for their future wellbeing is an important finding for PCOS, which is associated with other chronic conditions. Discussion this in the context of lifestyle management is important.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

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.