Author’s response to reviews

Title: Effect and neurophysiological mechanism of acupuncture in patients with chronic sciatica: Protocol for a randomized, patient-assessor blind, sham-controlled clinical trial

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Re: Manuscript ID TRLS-D-18-00503R1 Effect and neurophysiological mechanism of acupuncture in patients with chronic sciatica: Protocol for a randomized, patient-assessor blind, sham-controlled clinical trial

Dear Dr. Emily Peckham,
My colleagues and I greatly appreciate the comments and critiques of the reviewers and have incorporated their suggestions and recommendations into the manuscript. We wish to acknowledge the reviewers' contributions.

We thank you for your consideration and look forward to hearing from you.

Reviewer #1

1. Thank you for clarifying the reason for the normal control group. Please could you add a short explanation to the article, similar to that included in your covering letter, to explain why the normal control group has been included. This will be helpful to readers in understanding why the normal control group has been included.

We added the related explanations in the “Study design” part under Methods/design Section as follows:

The fMRI scanning will be conducted for 52 subjects (20 among the 34 experimental subjects, 20 among the 34 sham control subjects, and an additional 12 normal control subjects without any intervention; the normal control group of 12 subjects is for the analysis of fMRI data, not for the main analysis of the primary outcome, the VAS for bothersomeness. They don’t have chronic sciatica and don’t receive any interventions. They just serve as the normal control with two times of fMRI scanning.) at baseline and endpoint.

2. Item 5c on the SPIRIT checklist, thank you for adding the information about the study sponsor, please could you add page 23 to the checklist rather than N/A so that people reading the article know to refer to page 23 for information about the study sponsor.

Yes, we added page 25 (not 23, the information about the study sponsor in shown on page 25) to the checklist of Item 5c.

Sincerely yours,

Mi-Yeon Song, KMD, Ph. D.