

Doctors in TCMAAA Poke Holes in Australian Hinman’s “Acupuncture” Study

In 2009, NHMRC funded a research grant (No. 566783; \$687,239) to Dr. Rana S Hinman and her team as “*Laser acupuncture in patients with chronic knee pain: a randomised placebo-controlled trial*”. The grant resulted in a publication in the October 2014 issue of the Journal of American Medical Association (JAMA) titled “*Acupuncture for Chronic Knee Pain: A Randomized Clinical Trial*”. The authors (Hinman and her colleagues) concluded that “in patients older than 50 years with moderate or severe chronic knee pain, neither laser nor needle acupuncture conferred benefit over sham for pain or function. Our findings do not support acupuncture”. Following the publication, expert researchers called for explanations to study errors and inconsistencies. With unsatisfactory answers from Hinman and her colleagues, acupuncture organizations (23 organizations) filed three complaints with the University of Melbourne in May through July 2015, but in a letter dated 16 September 2015, the University denied all complaints without providing any reasonable supporting evidence and research documents.

Organizations, include TCMAAA, believe that Hinman and her colleagues breached research ethics and integrity from the following aspects:

1. *Possible Misleading in the research grant application.* Hinman et al. are high likely to have acted dishonestly during the grant application, using the name of “laser acupuncture” to acquire funding for “testing” acupuncture.
2. *Deliberate alteration of study objectives.* Significant and unbelievable inconsistencies in study objectives were noticed in the publication of the final report, the published study protocol, and trial registration. The final report in JAMA apparently focused on the effects of acupuncture as the primary outcome. This differs significantly from the objectives in trial registration or the published study protocol in which effects of laser acupuncture were as the primary outcome and the comparison between acupuncture and sham laser in the JAMA article were not planed or even mentioned in the original protocols.
3. *Publication with conflicting interests.* Hinman received royalties from a shoe company, for which she has also designed and is performing a clinical trial testing its efficacy in treating knee pain. Other authors in her team also received payment from other companies. Regarding the negative results of the published study by Hinman et al., Reuters reported, "As alternatives to acupuncture, Hinman said physical therapy, knee braces and exercise can all help alleviate chronic knee pain." Dr. Hinman is also a registered physiotherapist.
4. *Intentional errors to create negative results regarding acupuncture for knee pain.* There are many flaws in the study design, acupuncture protocol, statistical methods, possible purposeful alteration of study objectives, results and conclusion.
5. *Malicious attack of the acupuncture profession.* Hinman et al. failed to draw a fair conclusion based on their research findings to undermine the reputation of acupuncture.

6. Finally, the JAMA report by Hinman et al. is clearly a *post hoc* analysis. Failing to mention this nature in the report and tried to cover up in the reply is a severe violation of research and ethic codes. This fact alone is sufficient to all for retraction of this publication.

People may argue that some of these flaws may be explained by simple errors or lack of competence in research. However, Dr. Hinman is a renowned senior researcher and should have the sufficient knowledge, skills, and experience in research. Thus, these flaws/errors made by Hinman et al. are beyond the reasonable acceptable level, especially given the considerations of the conflicting interests of Dr. Hinman and her colleagues, failure to draw a fair conclusion, and the unjustifiable manipulation of study objectives in the publication. The only reason for a single best fit explanation of all these flaws in the report by a research team with top experienced senior researchers is that they did it purposely. Dr. Hinman and her research team had possibly cheated all the way from funding application, protocol design and implementation, result report and analysis and thus conclusion. We believe that Dr. Hinman et al. have purposefully violated the ethical standards in research integrity for the purposes of maliciously undermining the acupuncture profession. For the interests of patients, insurance companies, health care policy makers, and all relevant parties, we hope Australia Research Council conducts a thorough investigation and provide the results to the medical community, other interested parties and the public in a timely fashion.

[Published articles]

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樊蓁. 中医针灸界联合反击2014澳大利亚辛曼不实针刺研究报告事件-写于美国中医针灸界纪念针灸和中医立法40周年历程之际 (2015年7月10日) p1,p2

樊蓁.辛曼针灸临床试验的方法学缺陷 (1)

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