INTRODUCTION

Postherpetic neuralgia (PHN) is the persistence of the pain of herpes zoster more than 3 months after resolution of the rash. Common, affecting 10-15% of patients with zoster.1 Acute herpes neuralgia may be mild or severe. Patients report burning, aching, painful itching, electric shock-like pain, and skin pain. Patients at risk include populations with a weakened immune system, such as those who are affected with HIV and AIDS, who are receiving immunosuppressive drugs such as those used to treat cancer, who have auto-immune diseases, and who have undergone organ transplantation.2,4

PATIENTS AND METHODS

Subjects: Case histories of thirteen patients with PHN who had sought acupuncture treatment were reviewed for this analysis. See Table 1 for patient demographics.

Postherpetic neuralgia

Four patients were on anti-seizure medications. Four patients were prescribed ketamine (high levels of B12, and folate). Nine patients were taking anti-anxiety medication. Ten of the thirteen patients reported high levels of anxiety in addition to pain symptoms; four were on anti-anxiety medication. Some patients had been given topical analgesics, including: lidocaine 5% patch, Aspercream, and/or capsaicin cream.

Acupuncture treatments were performed twice a week for one to two weeks depending on the severity of the pain. Treatment frequency was then reduced to once weekly, then every other week, then monthly until the pain was eliminated. Narcotic medication was weaned at a rate of approximately 25% dosage per week. Anti-seizure medication was weaned after a significant drop in narcotic at the same rate. Discontinuation of narcotic was made after complete discontinuation of the anti-seizure medication.

Acupuncture may be a safe and efficacious treatment for PHN, and may permit patients to discontinue psychotropic medications previously used for pain management.

REFERENCES


6. www.fax.gov/FGAC/Features/2001/05/px.html

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Karmen Yoder PhD, ran the statistics and assisted in data reporting. Both Karmen and Jenelle Dorner provided technical assistance.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Jennifer A.M. Stone, BA, LAc.
East West Acupuncture Inc.
Indiana University School of Medicine
East West Acupuncture Inc.
T: 317.240.8090
F: 317.240.1040
E: jemeador@iupui.edu