

TITLE: Evaluating Acupuncture as an Intervention for HIV Symptom Relief and Improvement of Quality of Life for people living with HIV in Northern Thailand

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ISSUES:

Integrating acupuncture into treatment for people living with HIV (PLHIV) appears beneficial to quality of life (QoL), as an intervention for particular symptoms, and a precursor to social engagement.

DESCRIPTION:

This evaluation of the Mae On acupuncture clinic in northern Thailand employs a robust design, utilizing a QoL questionnaire and interviews. It focuses on a *qualitative* component, facilitating insight into the lived experience of respondents.

Twenty-eight PLHIV received 3 months of weekly acupuncture, and data were collected at the beginning and end of the treatment programme. Quality of life forms were piloted before the study, and results were incorporated into the final questionnaires.

LESSONS LEARNED:

Significant improvements were reported for most dimensions on the QoL scale, including general health, energy, appetite, ability to work, sleep and stress.

Participant interviews demonstrated four themes:

- **TREATMENT BENEFITS:** The majority of participants reported decreased severity of symptoms
- **SOCIAL NETWORK:** Many spoke of benefits from attending the acupuncture clinic and socializing with other PLHIV
- **TELLING OTHERS:** Participants described becoming 'ambassadors' for acupuncture
- **DESIRE TO CONTINUE:** All participants expressed a wish to continue acupuncture

Acupuncture appears to have many benefits as a treatment modality for PLHIV:

- It was well tolerated and safe, no adverse complications reported
- It was cost-effective, approximately \$7 per month for weekly treatments
- Many participants commented they experienced improved appetite, better sleep, less stress and more energy after acupuncture even though they were not treated directly for these conditions

NEXT STEPS:

The findings suggest that this low-cost intervention can be implemented in resource-poor settings to improve the quality of life and physical symptoms due to HIV and ARV therapy as well as to act as an important social and information centre for PLHIV.