

Auricular Acupuncture Evaluation Summary – August 2009

Participants

- Between May 2008 and March 2009, approximately 364 people attended the auricular acupuncture clinic, with an average of 20-25 new people every month
- 171 individual clients filled out a total of 117 pre-tests and 266 post-tests. Of these, 59 pre- and post-tests could be matched and provided the quantitative data for the evaluation
- 23 clients and 13 staff members participated in focus groups, interviews and an online survey and provided the qualitative data for the evaluation
- Of the clients who filled out a registration form, the majority (65%) had not had auricular acupuncture before. The majority of clients reported having experienced trauma (72%) and mental health issues such as depression (87%), anxiety (84%) and suicidal ideation (63%), but nearly half of the clients (44%) were not currently receiving care from a mental health provider

Findings

- The structure and focus of Klinik's auricular acupuncture program differs from the design and purpose outlined in the NADA protocol in three main aspects:
 - The group is a drop-in and has open membership, so that all clients may attend a different number of times over varying time frames;
 - The focus is not solely on addictions, and clients can attend to get help with other symptoms. The main areas Klinik clients wanted help with were relaxation, sleep, anxiety, regulating emotions and concentration;
 - Clients may be accessing auricular acupuncture as a stand-alone treatment, rather than a part of a comprehensive treatment program
- The evaluation was designed for use in an addictions treatment program, and therefore was unable to fully explore the effectiveness and outcomes of Klinik's program, with its unique context and clients' needs
- Overall, clients experienced an improvement in their well-being between their first and last auricular acupuncture session. The average overall score for the post-test was 24.4 points lower than the average overall pre-test, indicating that clients' symptoms were reduced over time
- The pre- and post-tests also showed that the severity of all symptoms (18 in total) was reduced. The symptoms that showed the greatest reduction were; Anxiety, Depression, Difficulty Relaxing, and Decreased Energy. Cravings, Difficulty Sleeping and Problems Concentrating were also significantly reduced
- Although the sample size was small, data showed that clients who had attended 11-20 sessions experienced greater improvements than those who attended 1-10 sessions

- Clients' stories about their experiences supported the quantitative findings that acupuncture can improve sleep, promote relaxation and calmness, and decrease anxiety
- Clients reported some effects that were not recorded in pre- and post-tests, including an increased sense of community among the acupuncture group members, increased motivation to participate in other self-care activities such as meditation or walking, and improved coping with stressful life events
- Some participants experienced pain from having the tacks in their ears, and a few experienced pain from the acupuncture needles. Three participants did not feel they had experienced any effects from acupuncture
- While pre- and post-test data showed that addictions and depression were common issues for participants and were reduced by acupuncture, clients did not talk about these issues in focus groups
- Clients and staff felt that acupuncture had improved the client-provider relationship by breaking down the barriers between the two groups and providing client-centred care
- Clients and staff agreed that acupuncture had a positive impact on counselling sessions because it helped to calm clients and prepare them to focus and talk
- Staff felt that acupuncture had improved their relationships and collaboration with other counsellors and enabled more than one counsellor to work with a client
- Some of the aspects of the program that made it easier for clients to attend were the drop-in structure, the no-cost service and the caring atmosphere. The main barrier to attendance was the time of the clinic
- Clients suggested holding evening or weekend acupuncture sessions
- Staff suggested having more opportunities for acupuncture practitioner meetings with other counselling staff and NADA trainers. They also felt that communication about acupuncture could be improved, both with other agencies and within Klinik

Recommendations

- Create clear goals for the program prior to delivery. Goals and outcomes should be evidence-based, measurable and achievable within a specific timeframe. Identify the potential participants
- Create an evaluation or research plan and tools based on the goals of the program, prior to delivery and specific to the context in which the program is being delivered