

Patterns of demand and supply for an acupuncture research information service

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Background

- ④ Acupuncture Research Resource Centre (ARRC) established in 1994.
- ④ Funded by the British Acupuncture Council (BAcC).
- ④ Purpose: to meet the research needs of the acupuncture profession in the UK.
- ④ As one of 3 core activities, ARRC provides a unique information and advice service, free-on-demand to all.
- ④ Requests come directly or via the BAcC.
- ④ Users may receive: references/abstracts, expert commentary, research project advice.
- ④ ARRC has its own electronic database.



Objective

To evaluate the demand for ARRC's information service: who uses it, what are their needs and how are these met?

Method

Records have been kept in a bibliographic database (Idealist software) since October 1998. A retrospective analysis of these was carried out for the four year period up to October 2002, to determine the frequency of different categories of service users and their requests.



Results

Service user profile

There were 960 different users of the information service over the four year period. Most contacted ARRC only once, but acupuncturists had more of a multi-use profile, with 35% making two or more requests. A few people were more frequent users, one person made 11 requests the most. In total there were 1333 requests over the time period..

Number of requests per person: frequency distribution

		Number of requests per person					
		1	2	3	4	5+	All
Acupuncturists	Frequency	262	83	27	15	17	404
	%	64.9	20.5	6.7	3.7	4.2	
Other users	Frequency	483	55	12	6	0	556
	%	86.9	9.9	2.2	1.0	0	

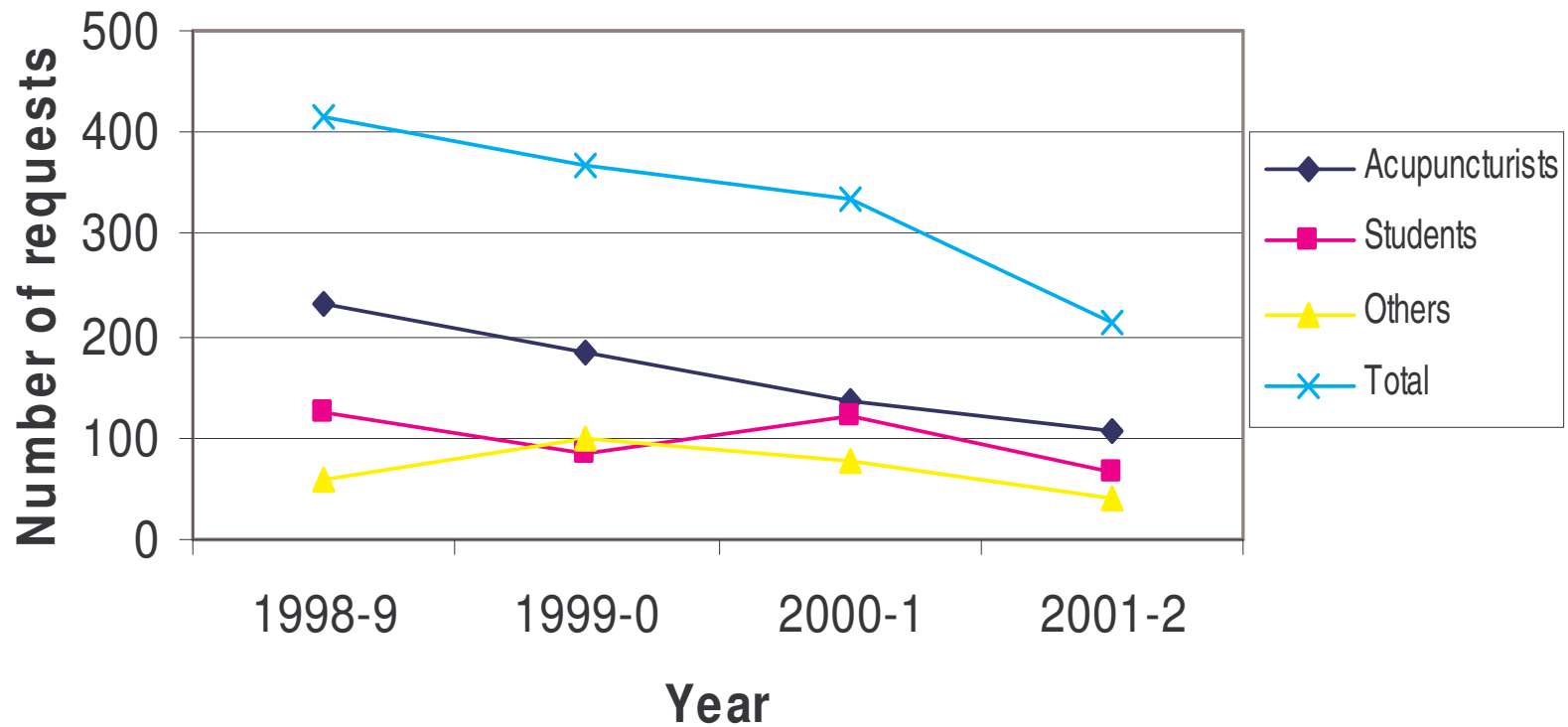


Who are the users?

- 42.1% Acupuncturists
- 19.5% Acupuncture students
- 12.2% Other students – nurses, doctors, other health and non-health related courses
- 7.5% Members of the public
- 5.4% Journalists
- 4.1% NHS - nurses, midwives, doctors and managers
- 2.6% Researchers
- 6.5% Others - other therapists, charities/support groups and educational institutions.



Number of requests per year, 1998-2002



Profile of requests and responses: acupuncturists

	Number	%
Literature search	214	41.1
Commissioned paper	189	36.8
General research info	23	4.5
Audit project	34	6.7
Other research projects	54	10.6

- 41% of requests required a literature search
- 37% received a copy of one of ARRC's commissioned evidence reviews ('Briefing Papers')
- 22% got information on research procedures and resources – for general interest or a specific project
- 50% of users wanted evidence to promote their practice/service – usually to the NHS**



Profile of requests and responses: other main user types

- ④ **Students:** material for their course dissertation/project/essay
- ④ **The public:** information about their illness – will acupuncture help? Personal experience as much as literature summaries
- ④ **Journalists:** sound-bites or expert commentary re. treatment of specific complaints; sometimes evidence; often, an explanation of how acupuncture works
- ④ **NHS:**
 - to guide referral decisions
 - to support acupuncture service development
 - to help with a research project
 - chronic pain, obstetrics and mental health topics cited most often



Discussion

- ④ The service has been used by a large number and variety of people, mostly as a one-off. Should it continue to be given freely except to BAcC members (and potential future members)?

- ④ Reduced demand over time may be from:
 - a) increased research capabilities in acupuncture colleges,
 - b) web site access to ARRC's dedicated papers.



Discussion (continued)

- ④ Most health professionals now have internet access but few have used it effectively for CAM information.
- ④ Many requests have sought evidence to support acupuncture's effectiveness. Depending on the circumstances this may/may not lead to positive bias in the material selected. Uncontrolled trials, audits, even anecdote can be more helpful than equivocal RCT reviews.



Conclusion

ARRC has evolved since 1994. The changes in demand for the service allow ARRC to provide a more proactive rather than responsive role.

Provision can now focus on:

- ④ Effective support to practitioners keen to explore research possibilities,
- ④ Raise research consciousness in the profession,
- ④ Promote acupuncture externally.

In the future, ARRC may become more of a central research facility.



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