GPs’ attitudes towards the provision of acupuncture on the NHS: a local study.

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Objective
This study investigates the attitudes of General Practitioners (GPs) to acupuncture, whether they think it should be available on the NHS and if so, in what way. It is intended to inform the local Primary Care Group (PCG), but also to be applicable to the national picture and political agenda.

Rationale
GPs are at the centre stage of the recently established Primary Care Groups. It is they who are making the commissioning decisions in the Primary Care led NHS. Local variations in the demands of primary care provide much of the rationale for the formation of PCGs. The literature shows that Complementary Medicine and especially acupuncture is now popular among both patients and GPs.

Design
A postal questionnaire was sent to all 65 practising GPs in the Melton Rutland Harborough Primary Care Group (MRH PCG).

Main outcome measures
The computer programme Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) was used to facilitate tabular and cross-tabular analysis and subsequent examination, description and discussion of questionnaire responses.

Results
A response rate of 83% was achieved. The main findings are that 59% of MRH GPs think that acupuncture should be available on the NHS. They consider both medical and non-medical practitioners suitable to practise acupuncture, at either NHS or non-NHS premises, with the NHS providing some, or all of the required funding. 98% of GPs have had conversations about acupuncture with their patients, 72% think acupuncture is cost effective and 83% clinically useful. Concerns are highlighted as to the potential limitation of acupuncture with its integration into the NHS. Other issues raised include lack of resources and evidence and the difference between Western acupuncture and traditional Chinese acupuncture. Only a few GPs had specific experience or knowledge of acupuncture.

Conclusion
The findings suggest that present acupuncture activity does not match GP desire. Any future integration of acupuncture into the NHS must address the knowledge deficit of GPs as well as issues such as where and by whom acupuncture is practised and how it is funded.

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