# Lay summary for completed research projects

| CCR No and Study Title: | CCR2758  
A randomised study to investigate the effectiveness of acupuncture for the relief of dyspnoea in patients with non-small cell lung cancer |
|---|---|
| CI and Sponsor names: | Dr Mary O’Brien  
The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust |
| Study opening date: | 01/07/2007  
Study closing date: | 24/06/2014 |
| Proposal and Objectives: | Breathlessness is one of the commonest symptoms of lung cancer. Morphine is sometimes used to treat breathlessness. This study investigated the use of acupuncture for the relief of breathlessness in lung cancer.  
We ran a trial in the Royal Marsden of 173 patients with non-small cell lung cancer or mesothelioma. Only patients who were short of breath were entered into the trial. Shortness of breath was assessed by the “dyspnoea visual analogue scale (VAS)”.  
This is a 10cm line on a piece of paper with descriptions at each end - “not at all breathless” is at one end and “worst ever breathlessness” at the other. The patient makes a mark on the line corresponding to the severity of their breathlessness.  
Patients were randomly allocated to receive acupuncture alone, morphine alone or both acupuncture and morphine (the combination). Acupuncture was given to the upper chest, back, shoulders and thumb. Semi-permanent acupuncture studs were placed on the skin at the top of the chest over the breastbone and left there for the duration of the study. These studs look like a small sticking plaster but have a very small needle underneath.  
The patient can then gently rub the surface of the stud if they feel breathless and this gives an “acupuncture-like” effect. Patients receiving acupuncture were also allowed to take morphine if they felt that acupuncture and massage studs was not helping their breathlessness enough. |
| Main Findings: | We found that the “dyspnoea VAS” improved by 1.5 points or more in 74% of those receiving acupuncture, 60% of those receiving morphine and 66% of those receiving the combination.  
We also tested patient’s anxiety levels. We found that anxiety improved in ... |
those taking acupuncture and those receiving the combination but not in those taking morphine on its own. We assessed anxiety levels using two scoring methods and both showed this improvement. Side effects experienced by the patients in our trial tended to be related to morphine. Acupuncture caused few side-effects.

| Implications for practice/future research: | Our study showed that acupuncture, morphine and the combination are effective in relieving breathlessness in patients with lung cancer and mesothelioma. Acupuncture also relieved anxiety and had fewer side-effects than morphine. Acupuncture could be used as an alternative to morphine, or together with morphine, for treating breathlessness. |