Assessing the Impact of Acupuncture on Pain, Nausea, Anxiety, and Coping in Women Undergoing a Mastectomy

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Purpose/Objectives: To compare the effect of acupuncture to a standard-of-care (control) group on pain, nausea, anxiety, and ability to cope.

Methods: Women were randomly assigned to two hospital-based acupuncture treatments versus usual care after breast cancer surgery. Pain, nausea, anxiety, and the patient’s ability to cope pre- and post-treatment were compared within and between groups at two different time points postoperatively.

Findings: Compared to women assigned to the control group, women who received acupuncture reported a statistically significant greater reduction in pain, nausea, anxiety, and increase in ability to cope on the first postoperative day and in pain on the second postoperative day following mastectomy surgery.

Conclusions: Acupuncture delivered postoperatively in the hospital after mastectomy can reduce the severity of symptoms experienced, as well as increase the patient’s ability to cope with her symptoms. However, before implementation as a standard of care, further research needs to be conducted.

Implications for Nursing: Acupuncture adds a nonpharmacologic intervention for symptom management in women undergoing mastectomies for breast cancer.