UCLH Charity Course: Intrapartum Acupuncture

Endorsed by the British Medical Acupuncture Society

Aims

The overall aim of this course is to provide clinicians with the knowledge and skills required to safely administer acupuncture at a basic level during labour and delivery. The techniques taught are based on Western medical acupuncture, which is a contemporary adaptation of traditional acupuncture founded upon principles of neurophysiology and evidence-based medicine. As such it builds upon the basic anatomy and physiology taught as part of core midwifery education and does not incorporate any “alternative” concepts or systems. For these reasons, a short course is practical and represents a complete (albeit basic) training.

Scope

This course was specifically developed to help facilitate widespread acupuncture provision by midwives in the context of routine NHS intrapartum care, predominantly as a method of pain relief. The systematic approach and eight acupuncture points taught during the course have been approved by the British Medical Acupuncture Society (BMAS) as a comprehensive training in the context in which it is intended. Following a satisfactory in-course assessment, delegates will be fully equipped to practice intrapartum acupuncture, subject to local arrangements. The course also serves as an introduction to the antenatal applications of acupuncture and further training to widen scope of practice is recommended (see below).

Medicolegal Issues

Acupuncture per se is not regulated in the UK, although practitioners in private acupuncture practice may have to register themselves and/or their premises with the local council under the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982, which also covers tattooing, ear piercing and electrolysis. However midwifery is regulated at a statutory level and therefore practitioners choosing to integrate acupuncture into their clinical practice must follow the relevant professional guidelines, which are detailed below. In addition, as of 17th July 2014 it has been a legal requirement for nurses and midwives to hold an indemnity arrangement in order to be registered with the Nursing and Midwifery Council. Whilst most midwives working within the NHS will have this provided by their institution, it is important that they follow relevant local clinical guidelines in order to maintain this protection. For this reason the facilitators of this course strongly advise that midwives only use acupuncture with their employer’s agreement and supported by a ratified clinical guideline in line with local clinical governance arrangement, and do not sanction independent use outwith such arrangements.
The UCLH Charity Intrapartum Acupuncture course is a BMAS-approved training course that includes assessment and verification of competence for needling at eight different body acupuncture points with appropriate sign-off by the facilitators. Immediately following the course it is expected that most delegates will be independently competent to administer acupuncture during labour and delivery, however any midwife who does not feel confident should seek direct or indirect supervision from a more qualified acupuncturist (see below). Arrangements for such support should be established in clinical areas where acupuncture is being offered to women in labour and included in local guidelines.

Continuing Professional Development

Midwives are held accountable for their own practice and as such must feel competent to practice and maintain their competence by engaging in on-going professional development. Clinical audit, reflective practice and peer review are actively encouraged. Regular meetings to discuss clinical cases including learning points should ideally take place locally. In addition a national network is being established to provide wider support for all midwives practising acupuncture and will be available soon at www.obstetricacupuncture.com. It is anticipated that this resource will incorporate evidence updates, online forums, E-learning and will be supported by annual conferences. Update sessions will be offered by UCLH Charity Courses. On-going professional development may also include working towards a BMAS qualification.

The Code: standards of conduct, performance and ethics for nurses and midwives
Nursing & Midwifery Council (2008)

“You must ensure that the use of complementary or alternative therapies is safe and in the best interests of those in your care.”

“As a professional, you are personally accountable for actions and omissions in your practice and must always be able to justify your decisions. You must always act lawfully, whether those laws relate to your professional practice or personal life.”

Standards for Medicines Management – 23: Complementary and alternative therapies
Nursing and Midwifery Council (2007)

“It is the responsibility of the nurse or midwife to judge whether the qualification awarded in a complementary therapy has brought them to a level of competence to use that skill for the people in their care and to work within their organisation’s local operating procedures, and governance framework.”

The Royal College of Midwives Position Paper (2006)

“Midwives who undertake to administer alternative therapies undergo an approved education and training programme and must be competent to offer alternative and complementary therapies in line with NMC guidelines.”
Antenatal Acupuncture

The facilitators of this course recommend that any midwife wishing to set up an antenatal acupuncture service should at least attend a BMAS Foundation Course and achieve the Certificate of Basic Competence (COBC), which is the qualification of choice for healthcare professionals wishing to use acupuncture within their scope of practice. Further information is available at www.medical-acupuncture.co.uk. Although local arrangements may vary, generally speaking NHS trusts and other healthcare employers would expect their staff to gain a formal qualification in acupuncture before setting up a dedicated acupuncture clinic. This is different to the intrapartum setting, in which midwives are offering acupuncture as one of a range of different treatment options for analgesia in which they have been trained.

Some individuals may choose to undertake further training and gain the BMAS Diploma in Medical Acupuncture (DipMedAc), which is the qualification of choice for healthcare professionals wishing to use acupuncture beyond their current professional scope of practice and provide acupuncture for the full range of medical conditions considered amenable to the technique. Attainment of DipMedAc confers full accreditation in medical acupuncture.

The BMAS also runs a bi-annual supplementary course called “Acupuncture in Pregnancy and Childbirth”, which is non-practical but gives a comprehensive overview of the evidence for obstetric acupuncture (including antenatal applications) and practical recommendations.