

# Acupuncturist

Acupuncturists treat medical ailments by inserting fine needles into key pressure points in the body. It is an ancient Chinese holistic therapy, based on the theory that the body's health depends on life energy (known as qi or chi). If the qi becomes unbalanced, the person might become ill. Western medical acupuncture is based on western medical diagnosis. Both the Chinese and western systems are used in the UK.

## What is the work like?

By inserting very fine needles into the skin, acupuncturists help to restore good health and emotional well-being. There are around 500 acupuncture points on the body. An acupuncturist usually selects 10 or 12 for each treatment. Some may select just a few to focus on. Consultations are done on a one-to-one basis.

A typical treatment would include:

- taking a detailed medical history from the client, including current symptoms and any treatment underway
- exploring lifestyle and emotional factors, such as diet, stress and exercise levels
- deciding on a course of action by assessing the suitability of acupuncture and making a diagnosis
- selecting specific points on the body to be treated
- inserting needles according to the level of stimulation required
- keeping records of treatments given to each patient.

An assessment may also include examining the patient's tongue and checking their pulse, which can also reveal health and energy imbalances. It is essential for an acupuncturist to know when to refer patients to their GP.

Other treatment forms may include:

- burning a dried herb on an acupuncture point (moxibustion)
- passing small electric currents through acupuncture points (electro-acupuncture)
- cupping (using a vacuum cup on the acupuncture points)
- massage
- tapping acupuncture points with a rounded probe.

In most cases, a number of treatments are required. The first consultation with a patient usually lasts between 40 and 90 minutes, with shorter subsequent treatments.

Acupuncturists also keep patient and financial records.

## Hours and environment

The majority of acupuncturists are self-employed working from home, rented premises or visiting clients in their homes. Some may work on a part-time basis at health clinics, hospices, cancer treatment units or addiction treatment centres.

Acupuncturists usually schedule appointments around their clients' needs. This means working flexible hours, including evenings and weekends. Some work part time.

Health and safety requirements, such as the cleanliness of equipment and surroundings and the safe disposal of used needles, are very important. The work involves standing and bending.

It is common for acupuncturists to work in more than one location, so a driving licence can be useful.

## **Salary and other benefits**

These figures are only a guide, as actual rates of pay may vary depending on a practitioner's marketing skills, reputation and geographical location.

- A newly qualified acupuncturist starting to build a practice may earn around £12,500 a year.
- An experienced acupuncturist may expect to earn around £18,000 to £20,000 a year.
- Acupuncturists with a large, established practice might receive over £40,000 a year.

Income depends on the number of patients seen and the amount charged for each session. This is usually around £40, but potentially up to £90 an hour in London. Outgoings such as rent, heating, lighting and transport will affect earnings.

## **Skills and personal qualities**

Acupuncturists should be:

- good communicators, able to explain treatments to a wide range of patients
- excellent listeners, with the ability to ask the right questions
- sensitive and considerate towards patients' personal circumstances
- precise, with good co-ordination and a steady hand
- logical in their approach to problem solving
- comfortable with close, physical patient contact
- tactful, trustworthy and discrete, inspiring confidence in patients
- able to keep an emotional distance from other people's problems
- aware of when to refer a patient to a conventional medical practitioner
- well organised and commercially competent in order to set up and run a successful business.

## **Interests**

It is important to:

- be interested in human biology and healthcare
- be interested in complementary therapies
- have a genuine desire to help people.

## Getting in

The British Acupuncture Council (BAcC) is the UK's main regulatory body for the practice of traditional acupuncture by nearly 3,000 professionally qualified acupuncturists.

Nearly all are self-employed. Some combine acupuncture with other complementary therapies, such as reflexology, herbal medicine or homeopathy.

Demand for acupuncture appointments is growing, in common with all other complementary therapies.

Although still quite rare, a small number of acupuncturists may be able to work part time in the NHS or through GP practices, in areas such as:

- pain management
- oncology (cancer treatments)
- stroke rehabilitation
- addictions
- psychiatric care
- HIV/AIDS treatments.

Limited part-time work may be available in hospices.

Vacancies are rarely advertised, but practice space for hire may be advertised in complementary therapy publications, including the Acupuncture in Medicine journal from the British Medical Acupuncture Society (BMAS) and the BAcC newsletter.

## Entry routes

Acupuncturists start their career by attending an accredited acupuncture training course.

At the moment, acupuncture is regulated only by voluntary agreement. Within the next three years, it is likely that acupuncture will be regulated in law. This will mean that only practitioners who meet the required standard will be able to practise as an acupuncturist. The BAcC works closely with the British Acupuncture Accreditation Board (BAAB), which provides a common educational standard. The BAAB lists accredited courses on its website. Training courses require a minimum of three years' full-time study at degree level (or four to six years part time) and are available at a number of institutions. These courses lead to professional membership of the BAcC.

Entry requirements for degree courses vary, but many institutions require at least five GCSEs (A\*-C) and two or three A levels, or equivalent qualifications. Science subjects are particularly useful. Candidates are advised to check with individual institutions. Some courses specify 21 as the minimum age to start training.

Many people train in acupuncture as a second career. Experience in counselling, advice work, massage or nursing may provide a good foundation for entry.

## Training

Self-employed acupuncturists are responsible for arranging and funding their own training and development.

The exact make-up of courses varies between institutions, but generally covers:

- diagnostic skills and techniques
- anatomy, physiology and other biomedical sciences
- acupuncture point location skills
- acupuncture techniques
- ethical and other professional issues
- the issues surrounding setting up a practice
- supervised clinical experience.

Some courses are available at postgraduate and doctorate levels.

As in any health-related profession, it is important to keep up to date with new techniques and changes in the law. BAAC runs a continuing professional development (CPD) programme for its members.

Acupuncturists may also train in other complementary therapies, such as herbal medicine or homeopathy, so they can offer a wider range of services to their patients.

## Getting on

There is no formal career progression for acupuncturists. Success for self-employed acupuncturists depends on building their client base and marketing their practice.

Experienced acupuncturists with an appropriate teaching qualification may be able to teach acupuncture. Alongside practising acupuncture, some may choose to carry out research or write books or articles for newspapers and magazines.

There may be opportunities to work abroad. Individuals should check that their qualification is recognised in the country where they hope to work. Some European countries, including France, ask for a medical qualification. The USA requires practitioners to pass an exam.

## Further information

The British Acupuncture Accreditation Board (BAAB), 63 Jeddo Road, London W12 9HQ. 020 8735 0466. Website: [www.baab.co.uk](http://www.baab.co.uk)

British Acupuncture Council (BAcC), 63 Jeddo Road, London W12 9HQ. 020 8735 0400. Website: [www.acupuncture.org.uk](http://www.acupuncture.org.uk)

British Medical Acupuncture Society (BMAS), 3 Winnington Court, Northwich, Cheshire CW8 1AQ. 01606 786782. Website: [www.medical-acupuncture.co.uk](http://www.medical-acupuncture.co.uk)

The Prince's Foundation for Integrated Health, PO Box 65104, London SW1P 9PJ. 020 7024 5755. Website: [www.fih.org.uk](http://www.fih.org.uk)

Skills for Health, 2nd Floor, Goldsmiths House, Broad Plain, Bristol BS2 0JP. 0117 922 1155  
Website: [www.skillsforhealth.org.uk](http://www.skillsforhealth.org.uk)

## Further reading

*Complementary Healthcare: A Guide* - The Prince's Foundation for Integrated Health

## Magazines/journals

*Acupuncture in Medicine journal* - BMAS

*BACc newsletter* - quarterly

(Some may be priced)

August 2009

Content provided by Jobs4U, author: Martin Webb. Original content: [Acupuncturist](http://Acupuncturist). Last update at 2009-09-21

---