

**College of Nursing** 

# Stakeholder perspectives on using acupuncture to manage multiple symptoms in medically underserved breast cancer survivors during endocrine therapy



Hongjin Li<sup>1,2</sup>, Ardith Z. Doorenbos<sup>1</sup>, Hannah Choi<sup>1</sup>, Judith M. Schlaeger<sup>1</sup>, Nia I. Butler<sup>3</sup>, Oana Danciu<sup>2</sup>, Zhengjia Chen<sup>2</sup>, Natalie Lif<sup>1</sup>, Crystal L. Patil<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> College of Nursing, University of Illinois Chicago, Chicago, IL 60612, USA, <sup>2</sup> University of Illinois Cancer Center, Chicago, IL 60612, USA, <sup>3</sup> School of Nursing, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109, USA

## Background

- Up to 94% of breast cancer survivors experience one or more symptoms during endocrine therapy. Acupuncture, an evidence-based complementary and integrative therapy, is used to manage cancer treatment-related symptoms. Medically underserved breast cancer survivors face limited access to acupuncture services.
- Therefore, we conducted interviews with multiple stakeholders, including patients and healthcare professionals, to assess the acceptability and feasibility of acupuncture for managing multiple symptoms in breast cancer survivors with limited access to healthcare and acupuncture services.

# Purpose

 To examine stakeholder views on the use of acupuncture for symptom management in medically underserved breast cancer survivors.

#### Methods

Study Design	A qualitative study using in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted by the two experienced researchers (AD,CP)
Participants	<ol> <li>Patients (n=12): female breast cancer survivors who completed a 10-session acupuncture treatment protocol for symptoms related to endocrine therapy</li> <li>Healthcare professionals (n=14): administrators, providers, leadership, and staff</li> </ol>
Setting	University of Illinois Health and Mile Square Health Center
Procedure	Following the informed consent process, one-to-one interviews were conducted online via video conferencing. The interview format aimed to foster open discussion about participants' perceptions and acceptance of acupuncture and factors influencing its use. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using conventional content analysis. A total of 26 interviews were conducted between August 2023 and May 2024.
Analysis	<ul> <li>Three coders (CP, HC, NB) independently reviewed each transcript using MAXQDA 24 software. A general inductive content analysis approach was used to examine interview narratives.</li> <li>Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic characteristics.</li> </ul>
Ethical Approval	The Institutional Review Board of the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) approved this study (No. 2022-0353).

## Results

**Education level** 

- 1. Study characteristics
- Patient demographics (n=12)

**Age** 56.0±8.3 years (44-71 years)

Race White (3), African American (8), American Indian/Alaska Native (1)
High school graduate (2), Some college (3), Bachelor's degree (4),

Graduate degree (3)

**Annual household income** ≤\$35k (4), \$35k-\$55k (4), \$55k-\$100k (3), ≥\$100k (1)

Healthcare professional demographics (n=14)

**Gender** Male (4), female (10) **Work experience** 8.9 years (3-25 years)

Race White (10), Black/African American (2), Asian (1), unknown (1)
Healthcare provider (11), leadership (4), navigator (1),

Position\* administrator (1)

Previous acupuncture experience Yes (4), no (9), unknown (1)

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Willing to prescribe acupuncture Yes (8), no (6)

Note: ( ) indicate number of participants; \* Respondents were permitted to select multiple answers.

#### 2. Factors affecting the use of acupuncture in practice

#### <Facilitators>

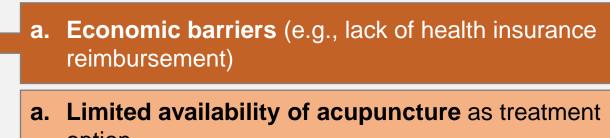
- a. Insurance coverage and value-based reimbursement models
- b. Evidence-based standards and guidelines
- a. Community-based service in collaboration with partners or wellness centers
- b. Relaxing atmosphere and enhanced privacy
- c. Provider training and patient education/referrals
- d. Support from leadership and advocates
- e. Improving credentialing procedures
- a. Effective communication between acupuncturist and patient & between clinicians
- **b. Patient-centered adaptation** (e.g., language, culture)
- a. Good acceptability related to positive expectancy/belief in acupuncture, previous experience, recommendations, openness to new treatment
- **b. Convenient access** to acupuncture services (e.g., flexible scheduling, free parking, nearby location)

#### Conclusions

- Most breast cancer survivors reported positive effects of acupuncture on their physical and emotional well-being and were willing to share their acupuncture experience with others. Both survivors and their providers were open to and interested in integrating acupuncture into treatment plans.
- Breast cancer survivors and healthcare professionals both addressed acceptability, accessibility, and affordability issues related to integrating acupuncture into treatment plans for symptom management. Leveraging facilitators and overcoming barriers are essential to effectively deliver acupuncture to medically underserved breast cancer survivors, thereby advancing have equity in accessing acupuncture treatment.

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- Author's contact information: Hongjin Li (hongjin@uic.edu)



<Barriers>

- b. Lack of space/facility and parking
- c. Lack of provider training and patient education
- d. Lack of leadership support
- e. Ineffective credentialing
- a. Communication issues between acupuncturist and patient & between primary care provider and acupuncturist
- a. Low acceptability related to differences in culture and education, negative beliefs/attitudes of acupuncture, and reluctance to try new treatment
- **b.** Low accessibility related to time constraints for providers and challenges for underserved patients (e.g., cost, transportation, location, time, comorbidities)

