

# Evaluating Acupuncture as an Adjunct to Cancer Treatment

Isabelle Stewart

Susan D. Flynn Oncology Nursing Fellow, Boston College

## Background

In 2024, an estimated 2 million new cancer cases will be diagnosed in the United States (NCI, 2024b). Approximately one-third of cancer patients reported using integrative therapies, combined with mainstream cancer treatments, to aid in managing side effects (Semeniuk et al., 2023). Acupuncture, an integrative therapy, addresses a wide array of symptoms and side effects in cancer patients, including but not limited to nausea, fatigue, and peripheral neuropathy (NCI, 2024a). Research investigating acupuncture as an adjunct therapy alongside conventional cancer treatments is expanding, with patients demonstrating a strong willingness to incorporate acupuncture for effective symptom management (NCI, 2024a).

## Significance

As cancer therapies continue to turn toward placing a holistic view upon treating people with cancer, it is important to better understand patients' experiences of the use of integrative therapies, including but not limited to acupuncture. This project dives into the motivation behind starting acupuncture and examines its effectiveness to treat and manage side effects from infusion therapy cancer treatments.

## Methods

This project utilized a qualitative interpretive approach to explore patients' experiences with acupuncture alongside infusion therapy for cancer treatment. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews. Eight people participated, each interview lasting 15-20 minutes. Observations of acupuncture sessions and interviews were conducted on participants' treatment day. Acupuncturists provided important insight into the acupuncture process. Thematic analysis was used to analyze interview data, aiming to capture patients' overall experiences and feelings about acupuncture.

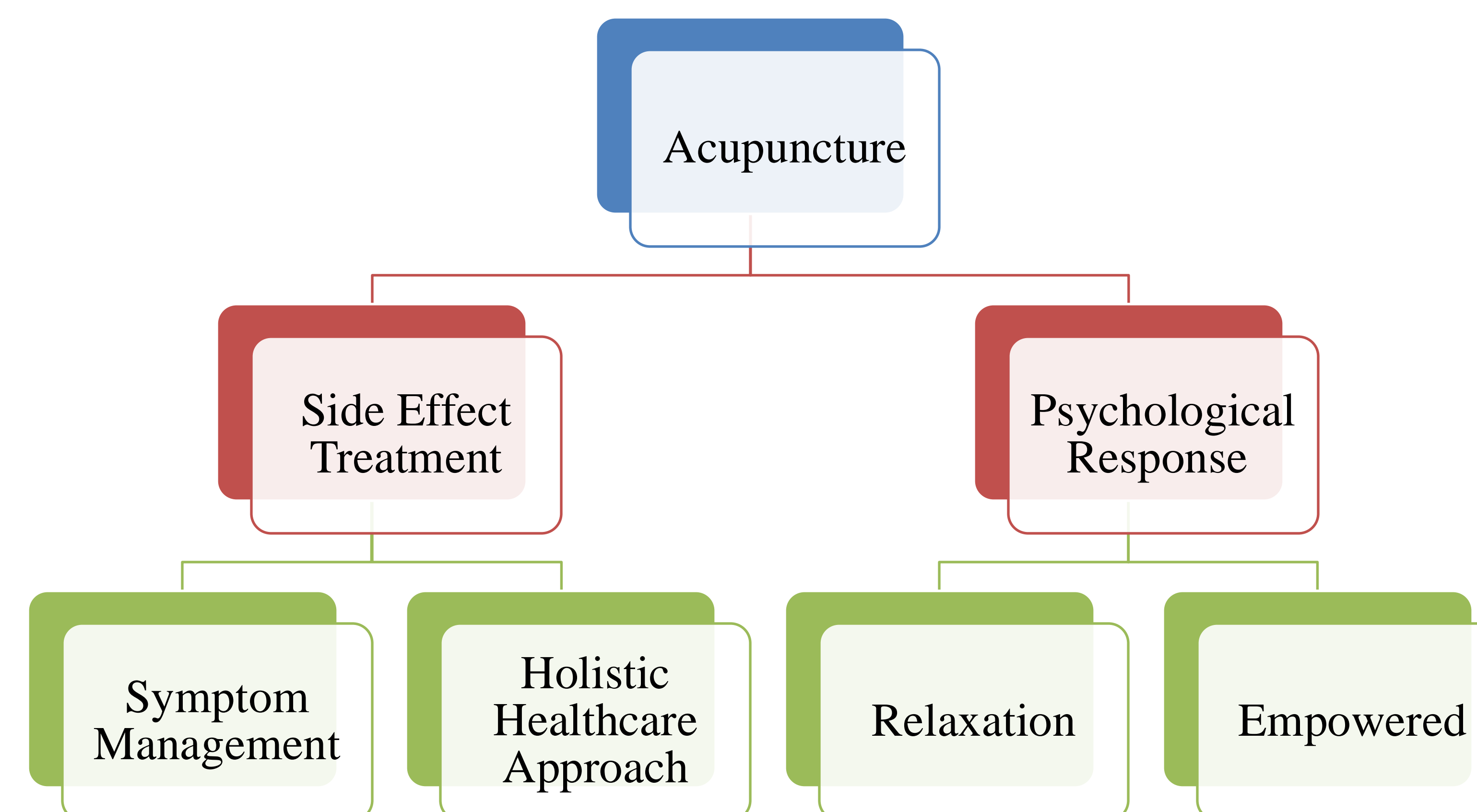
## Clinical Question

*What are the experiences of patients using acupuncture as an adjunct to their cancer treatment?*

## Findings

Patients' experience with acupuncture is divided into two main themes:

- Treatment for side effects from cancer therapies
- Positive psychological response to acupuncture to help their overall well being



Acupuncture was reported by patients to alleviate the intensity of side effects from cancer treatments. Additionally, it provides a relaxing and pleasant experience during or after treatments and empowers patients by allowing them to actively engage in something positive for their bodies.

*“I cannot imagine how I would be feeling if I hadn’t started acupuncture.”*

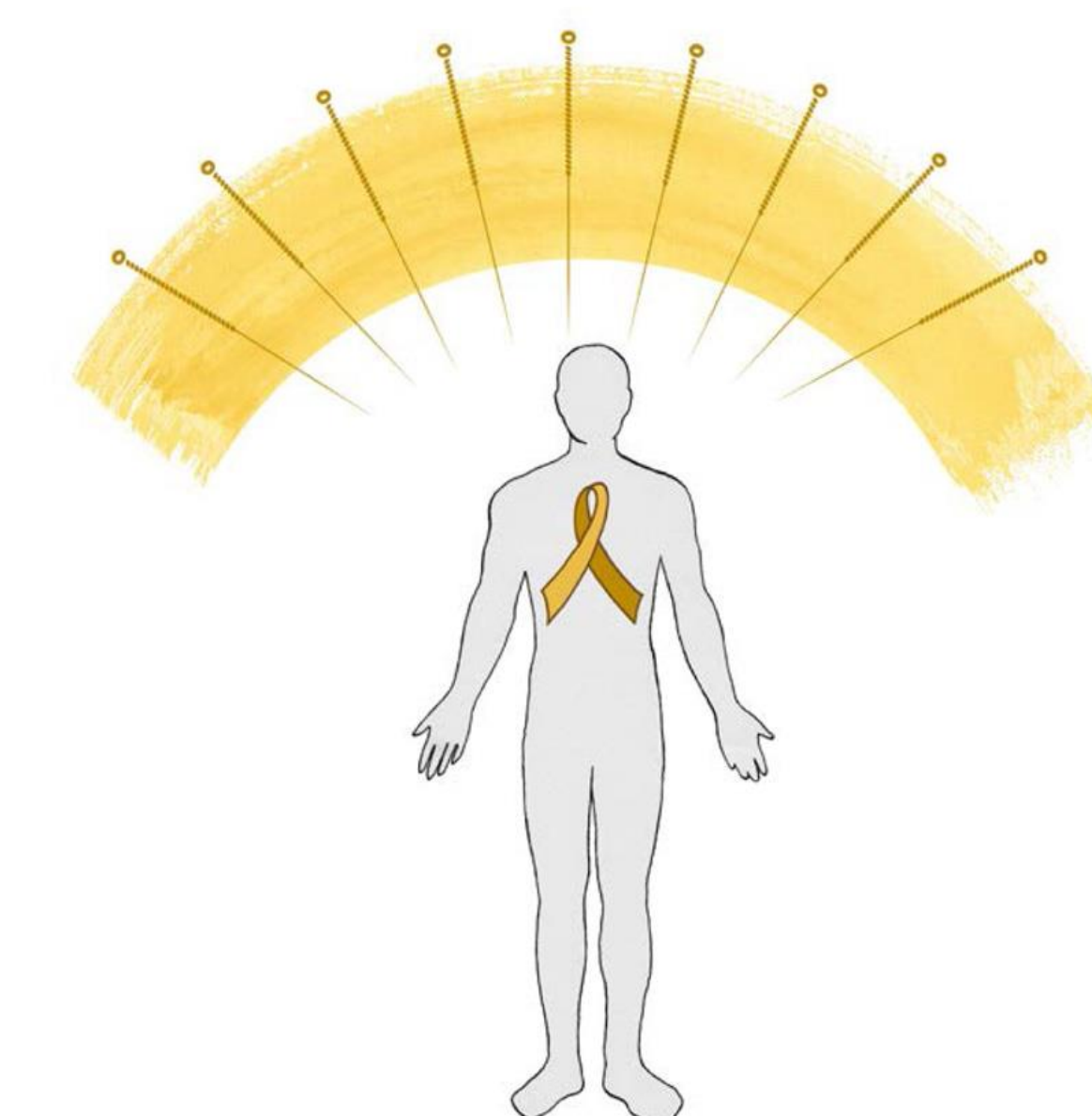
## Discussion

While patients do not believe acupuncture is curing their cancer, they recognize it as a vital component of their multidisciplinary care. Acupuncture helps patients manage their side effects from cancer treatments, find relaxation during a stressful time, and fosters a sense of proactive self-care. Integrative therapies are an important piece of holistic cancer care.

This project does not represent all possible patient experiences with acupuncture. Additional work with a larger sample size is recommended.

## Recommendations

Based on these findings, it is evident that acupuncture has a positive impact on cancer patients. It is recommended that facilities treating patients with cancer diagnoses make acupuncture and other integrative therapies accessible as part of holistic patient care. Education for cancer patients regarding acupuncture as an adjunct therapy is encouraged as it can enhance their overall treatment experience.



## References

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