

A MODEL METHOD FOR HYGIENIC SKIN PIERCING

INTRODUCTION

Outbreaks of Hepatitis B from unhygienic acupuncture have occurred in England (J. med. Virol. 1978) and in the USA (Morbidity Mortality Weekly Report 1981). An association between Hepatitis B and repeated acupuncture has been noted (British Medical Journal 1974).

PREMISES

General

Acupuncturists' surgeries must be clean and be capable of being kept clean. A smooth impervious floor is preferable to a carpeted one, though the latter is acceptable. A hot and cold wash basin fitted with foot- or elbow-operated taps is essential. The basin should be cleaned with a suitable household non-abrasive cream at the end of each session. Soap and disposable paper towels must be available and accessible; hot air hand dryers are also acceptable. Lighting must be adequate.

Couch

The surface of the couch should have a smooth impervious surface, such as vinyl, in good repair. It should be kept clean and washed with detergent and hot water regularly. Patients should lie on a disposable paper sheet rather than the bare surface.

Other Surfaces

Other operating surfaces should likewise have a smooth impervious surface and must be kept clean.

Personal hygiene

Good personal hygiene is important. Hands especially must be clean and nails short and clean. If the acupuncturist has a cut or abrasion, or any type of skin infection, on his wrist or hand, he must use gloves. It is not necessary to use sterilised surgical gloves: vinyl examination gloves are cheaper, and serve the purpose. A new pair should be used after each client. Broken skin or infections on other exposed parts of body, such as face, should be covered with a waterproof plaster.

Records

Detailed records of every patient must be kept – these should include the name and address of the patient, the date, and details of work done.

EQUIPMENT

Recommended equipment of good hygiene will include:

- Autoclave or dry heat oven (unless disposable needles are used, or reusable Needles sterilised elsewhere)
- Paper tissues and towels
- “Sharps” disposable boxes for contaminated needles
- Two or more autoclave containers for needles e.g. kidney dishes, preferably perforated metal forceps
- Alcohol-impregnated swabs, pre-packed
- Disinfectants – see appropriate section

PREPARATION AND ACUPUNCTURE OPERATION

A. Skin preparation

The patient's clothes should remain well away from the area of the skin to be pierced. A “Medi-swab” or similar alcohol impregnated swab should be used on the skin before acupuncture commences. Obviously dirty skin should be washed. Acupuncture should not be carried out within 6 inches of infected areas of skin or body, or areas covered with skin rash. It should be deferred until the infection has cleared or the rash treated adequately.

B. Preparation and use of acupuncture equipment

- 1) Disposable pre-sterilised acupuncture needles are recommended. After use, they must be thrown away.
- 2) A) Stainless steel, silver or other suitable autoclavable metal needles can be used however more than once. They must be washed in hot water and detergent, rinsed in hot water and then sterilised before being used for the first time and between patients.

B) If an acupuncturist can negotiate with a local hospital to sterilise his needles for him, this is ideal. After use the needles should be washed in hot water and detergent, rinsed, placed in the appropriate autoclave envelopes and delivered to the hospital. Procedures B) and I)(p.4) should be as for disposable needles.
- 3) Under no circumstances must the needles be coated with Vaseline, lubricating Jelly, glycerine, oil or grease before being autoclaved.
- 4) The estimated number of needles for one day are then washed and sterilised.
- 5) Needles, metal forceps and metal dish should be sterilised in an autoclave with saturated steam at 134°C for 3 minutes.
- 6) As an alternative but less reliable method (see Sterilisation) a dry heat oven may be used; recommended temperatures are 180°C for 20 minutes or 190°C for 10 minutes. Heating up time should be discounted. Needles may be wrapped in aluminium foil or placed in a test tube for dry heat methods only. Using aluminium

foil improves heat transfer and also has the advantage in that several “packets” can be made up, each containing the number of needles required for one patient.

If either method is used, any unused needles from one foil packet or tube should be re-sterilised with ‘contaminated’ needles.

Note: Aluminium foil packets must **not** be used in an autoclave.

- 7) The temper or sharpness of a needle must **not** be tested on the acupuncturist’s skin before use.
- 8) After being sterilised the needles and forceps may be left in the closed autoclave or oven until use.
- 9) Sterile forceps must be used for removing sterile needles from the container. Only then can the needles be handled with fingers, but only handle: the shaft of the needle should not normally be touched with the bare fingers. Once a finger has touched a part of the needle shaft that has already penetrated the skin, the finger should be considered to be contaminated; the hand should be washed especially thoroughly before the next patient. The forceps must not be used for contaminated needles.
- 10) If the acupuncturist uses his left hand to stretch the skin of the patient before inserting the needle he should ensure that the point entry is well away from his fingers.
- 11) At the end of the acupuncture procedure the needles that have been used on a customer must not under any circumstances be returned to the receptacle containing the autoclaved needles. ‘Used’ needles must either be discarded immediately if disposable or placed in another receptacle.

C. After care

1) Resterilisable needles and forceps

Used needles in the contaminated dish must be washed thoroughly in hot water and detergent (take care!) rinsed in hot water, and batch re-autoclaved at the end of the day. The forceps should also be re-autoclaved. The receptacle for needles should be autoclaved separately and upside down, unless the perforated type is used.

2) Disposable needles

These must be placed immediately after each patient’s treatment is completed in a suitable sharps disposable box.

3) Paper towels and swabs

Must be renewed between patients. Used towels and swabs must be placed in a lidded plastic-lined bin.

4) Care of skin after acupuncture

The punctured area of skin should be left uncovered.

DISPOSAL

All waste matter except needles and including swabs, paper towels and tissue should be collected in a sealable leak-proof plastic bag or box and incinerated, or autoclaved before disposal. Particular care must be taken in the disposal of needles; a stout 'sharps' disposal box for needles, such as is used in hospitals, is recommended. Disinfectants may be poured carefully down the sink after use, and flushed with running water. All other items used for one customer e.g. paper tissues, paper cups etc., must be disposed of by incineration or into a waste bin lined with a plastic bag which can be sealed and incinerated. Special arrangements must be made for disposal of the sharps boxes and sealed waste-bags which should not be allowed to enter the public refuse collection system. Most Environmental Health Departments will be pleased to offer advice and possibly, assistance.

HYGIENIC PROCEDURE FOR ACUPUNCTURISTS

As a guide to acupuncturists, the following list of step-by-step procedures, based on the directions given above, may be helpful.

BEFORE EACH SESSION

- a) Estimate number of needles to be used for the next day or session.
- b) Either set out the disposable needles, without removing them from their packets, or wash re-usable needles and forceps with detergent and hot water, then rinse.
- c) Autoclave re-usable needles and forceps, and container.
- d) Leave autoclaved needles in container in closed autoclave.
- e) Clean down table and/or couch surfaces as instructed.

BEFORE COMMENCING ACUPUNCTURE

- f) Wash and dry hands.
- g) Place large fresh paper towel on table surface and/or couch.
- h) Clean skin with spirit swab.
- i) Remove needle with, sterilised forceps, from container, begin acupuncture.
For disposable needles, forceps are unnecessary.

AFTER ACUPUNCTURE

- j) When acupuncture is finished, remove needle from patients, place re-usable needles in kidney dish or perforated tray designated for used ("dirty") instruments; or place disposable needles in "sharps" disposal box.

k) Do not cover puncture spots

l) Remove paper and all swabs or tissues used on patient, place in bin

m) Clean down table surfaces.

Then begin at f) again.