

Editorial

And the ICMART Science Award 2025, Presented at the World Congress on Medical Acupuncture, Goes to...

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Abstract

During this year's World Congress on Medical Acupuncture, the ICMART (International Council of Medical Acupuncture and Related Techniques) Science Award 2025 was presented in recognition of excellence in research and innovation within the field of medical acupuncture. The award honored pioneering work on acupuncture and moxibustion in chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), conducted in collaboration with the team at Hubei University of Chinese Medicine, Wuhan. The study, a randomized controlled trial (RCT), showed that acupuncture produces immediate autonomic effects, and moxibustion results in longer-lasting improvements, as evidenced by heart rate variability (HRV) measurements. Prof. DDr. Dr. h.c. TCM univ. Gerhard Litscher received the award, acknowledging his significant scientific contributions to evidence-based acupuncture research, innovation, and international collaboration. The ICMART Jury, chaired by Prof. Dominik Irnich, praised the work for its scientific rigor, methodological excellence, and global impact. Presented at the 38th ICMART



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World Congress in Antibes Juan-les-Pins, France, on November 8, 2025, the research highlights the successful integration of traditional and modern medicine, offering non-pharmaceutical interventions for CFS and post-viral fatigue syndromes, including long COVID. This achievement underscores a model of global scientific partnership.

Keywords

Acupuncture; International Council of Medical Acupuncture and Related Techniques (ICMART); international symposium; traditional Chinese medicine; evidence-based medicine; acupuncture; heart rate variability (HRV); chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS)



Prof. Litscher's PowerPoint presentation from the award lecture is available here: <https://www.lidsen.com/journals/icm/icm-10-04-049/obm.icm.2504049-supplementary.pdf>.

1. Introduction

This year, the ICMART (International Council of Medical Acupuncture and Related Techniques) Science Award 2025 was presented to Prof. DDr. Dr. h.c. TCM univ. Gerhard Litscher. This honor recognizes his pioneering research on acupuncture and moxibustion for patients with chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), conducted in collaboration with the team at Hubei University of Chinese Medicine in Wuhan, China.

The Award Jury explicitly recognized the study's [1] scientific rigor, clinical relevance, and innovative methodology, highlighting it as a model for evidence-based integration of traditional therapies into modern medicine. The award was formally presented at the 38th ICMART Congress in Antibes Juan-les-Pins, located on the French Côte d'Azur, on November 8, 2025. Gerhard Litscher personally presented the work to the international audience, highlighting both the scientific findings and the collaborative efforts with the Wuhan team.

2. A Personal Moment: Surprise Announcement by Jury Chair

The announcement of the award came as a delightful surprise. Prof. Dominik Irnich from Munich, Germany, Chair of the ICMART Science Award Jury, personally informed Prof. Litscher only a week before the ceremony. On Monday morning, he asked Prof. Litscher to return his call, during which he shared the joyful news that the Jury had selected his work. This moment underscored the Jury's personal appreciation for the groundbreaking collaboration between Prof. Litscher and the team in Wuhan, which the Jury emphasized as exemplary for international scientific partnerships.

3. ICMART: A Global Leader in Acupuncture and Integrative Medicine

The International Council of Medical Acupuncture and Related Techniques (ICMART) is the world's leading umbrella organization for medical acupuncture and related techniques (Figure 1). Founded in Vienna, Austria in 1983, it represents around 80 national medical acupuncture associations and over 35,000 practitioners worldwide. The organization is committed to promoting

scientific research, standardizing training, and integrating acupuncture into modern medicine. Additionally, it organizes annual international world congresses.



Figure 1 ICMART connects more than 80 national and regional acupuncture societies globally. The Jury recognized Prof. Litscher’s collaboration with China as an exemplary model of global partnership in Acupuncture and Related Techniques. © ICMART (<https://icmart.org/>).

By awarding Gerhard Litscher and his collaborative work with the team at Hubei University of Chinese Medicine in Wuhan, the Jury acknowledged a project that perfectly aligns with ICMART’s mission: to bridge traditional medicine and modern evidence-based research for the benefit of patients worldwide.

4. Acupuncture and Moxibustion: Targeting the Autonomic Nervous System

In a rigorously designed randomized controlled trial (RCT), Gerhard Litscher and the team from Prof. Liang Fengxia in Wuhan investigated the effects of acupuncture and moxibustion on the autonomic nervous system using heart rate variability (HRV). The ICMART Award Jury highlighted that the study demonstrated distinct physiological responses: acupuncture produced immediate autonomic effects, while moxibustion provided longer-lasting improvements. The findings underscore the potential for these techniques to pave the way for individualized, patient-specific therapies (Figure 2).



Figure 2 Prof. Gerhard Litscher personally presented the study's findings and future aspects to the international audience, highlighting collaboration with the Wuhan team. The presentation took place in Antibes Juan-les-Pins, Côte d'Azur, France, on November 8, 2025.

5. Clinical Relevance in Post-Viral Fatigue

The study's findings are also especially relevant in the context of long COVID, which shares many symptoms with CFS, including fatigue, poor sleep, and autonomic dysregulation. The awarded research offers robust, non-pharmaceutical treatment options for millions worldwide, directly supporting ICMART's mission of evidence-based integrative medicine.

6. Methodological Excellence and International Collaboration

The trial featured real and sham acupuncture controls, robust statistical analysis, and strict ethical oversight. The Jury praised the transparent discussion of study limitations and publication in a Q1-ranked journal as evidence of scientific integrity [1].

The collaboration between Prof. Litscher and the team at Hubei University of Chinese Medicine in Wuhan, represents a model of international scientific cooperation, maintained even through the COVID-19 pandemic via online coordination (Figure 3). This enduring partnership has been a key factor in the study's success.



Figure 3 Team photo featuring collaborators from Austria, Switzerland, and Wuhan. Prof. Liang Fengxia (left) sits next to Prof. Litscher, accompanied by the international team at Hubei University of Chinese Medicine, Wuhan, China.

7. Conclusion: A Milestone in Evidence-Based Integrative Medicine

The ICMART Science Award team recognized this study as a landmark achievement in integrating acupuncture and moxibustion into evidence-based clinical practice for CFS and long COVID. The Jury highlighted the work of Prof. Litscher and the Wuhan team as a prime example of innovative, internationally collaborative research, reflecting ICMART's vision of providing safe, effective, and scientifically validated acupuncture worldwide (Figure 4). Antibes Juan-les-Pins on the Côte d'Azur in France provides an ideal setting for discussions on further research in the field of acupuncture and chronic fatigue syndrome using heart rate variability (Figure 5 and Figure 6).

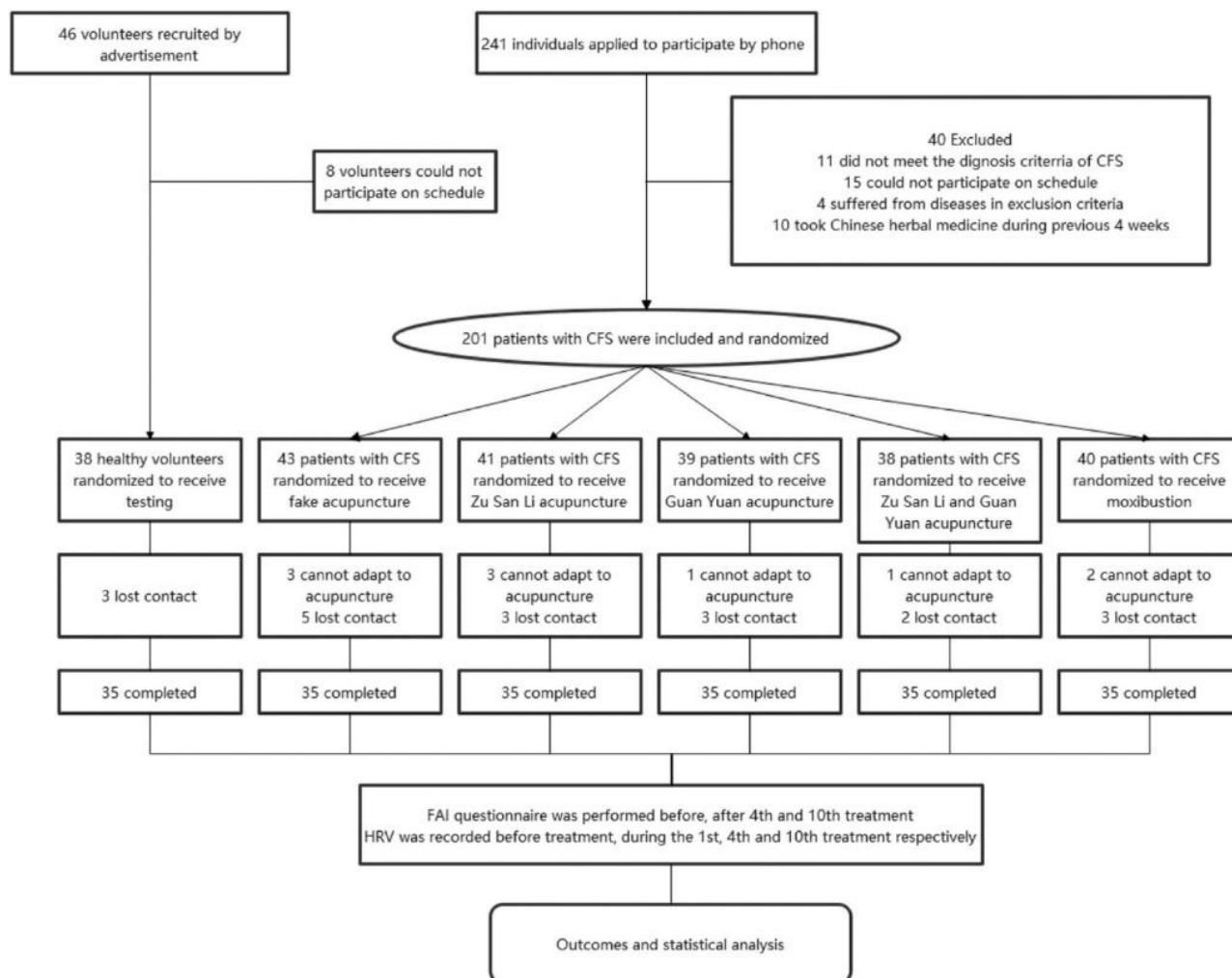


Figure 4 Graphical representation of the study design and techniques applied in the trial (modified from [1]). The Jury recognized the systematic comparison of techniques by Prof. Litscher and the Wuhan team as a novel contribution.



Figure 5 Antibes Juan-les-Pins, Côte d’Azur (France), November 8, 2025 – Prof. Gerhard Litscher was honored with the ICMART Science Award 2025 during the International ICMART Congress held in Antibes Juan-les-Pins on the French Riviera. The award was presented to Prof. Litscher by the President of ICMART, Patrick Sautreuil (France, right), and the Chair of the Jury, Prof. Dominik Irnich (Germany, left). The ICMART Science Award recognizes outstanding scientific achievements and contributions to the field of medical acupuncture research and related medical sciences. Also pictured are members of the jury, presidents of international ICMART member societies, and leaders of ICMART, who attended the ceremony in medical acupuncture research.



Figure 6 Additional highlights from the congress include notable interactions involving Prof. Litscher, who was joined by a delegation from Slovenia. This group was led by President Prim. Dr. Jadwiga Kosi (third from the left), Vice President Dr. Tanja Rauter Pungartnik (second from the right) and General Secretary Dr. Slavka Topolić (fourth from right) of the Slovenian Medical Acupuncture Society, an ICMART member association. They accompanied him during the award ceremony held at the Palais des Congrès in Antibes Juan-les-Pins.

Author Contributions

The author did all the research work for this study and would like to cordially thank all the people involved.

Competing Interests

The author hereby declares that no conflict of interests exists in connection with the publication of this editorial.

Data Availability Statement

All photos © G. Litscher.

AI-Assisted Technologies Statement

An AI tool (ChatGPT by OpenAI, GPT-4.0) was used for the initial translation of this contribution from German into English. The author has carefully reviewed and edited the final version, which was also polished by a native speaker. The author takes full responsibility for the content of the manuscript.

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