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Summary

Episode 7: UEG Journal Podcast Christmas Special

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Podcast Episode

Primary Care

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A multicenter randomised sham-controlled trial found that transcutaneous auricular vagus nerve stimulation showed no benefit over sham treatment for chronic constipation, with identical response rates in both groups leading to early termination for futility.

KEY POINTS

- The trial was methodologically rigorous with double-blinding, sham control, and a pre-planned interim futility analysis that led to early termination when active and sham groups showed identical response rates.
- The guest editor argues that well-conducted negative trials are as important to publish as positive ones because they advance the field by identifying what does not work and informing future research directions.
- Safety was reassuring with no serious adverse events and balanced minor events between groups, suggesting the intervention poses minimal harm even though it lacks efficacy.
- The discussion highlights a clinical gap between conservative laxative therapy and invasive surgical options for constipation, which neuromodulation approaches aim to fill but require better mechanistic understanding.
- Future research should focus on mechanistic studies in humans including brain imaging and electrophysiology to understand which pathways are affected, along with exploring whether the intervention targets motility, pain, or both in different patient populations.

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