

Conflicts of interest case study: Making referrals to a colleague

Note: While this scenario has focused on an osteopath, it could also apply to a range of healthcare professionals who work in similar circumstances. The suggestions offered are examples, and are not an exhaustive list of all the possible solutions or courses of action.

The scenario

Lucy Dickens is an osteopath who runs a clinic where she also rents out treatment rooms on a sessional basis to other healthcare practitioners. One of these is an acupuncturist, who pays Lucy a 25% share of any patient fees she receives when working at the practice.

What did Lucy consider?

Lucy frequently refers her patients to the acupuncturist who works in her clinic. She wonders whether a reasonable person might consider that her judgement in making such a referral might be influenced by the fact that she has a commercial interest in the acupuncturist seeing as many patients as possible, posing a potential conflict of interest.

What did Lucy do?

When discussing with a patient that she thinks they may benefit from acupuncture, Lucy makes it clear that although she has a colleague within her practice who can offer this, the patient should not feel under any pressure to see this person. The patient is able to decide whether to consult this, or another acupuncturist, or not to have acupuncture at all, and any decision they make will not affect the quality of any ongoing osteopathic care.

Other useful resources for you

- Joint statement from the Chief Executives of statutory regulators of healthcare professionals.
- [The Osteopathic Practice Standards](#)
- [The 7 principles of public life](#) (*'Nolan principles'* May 1995) – apply to anyone who works in health, education, social and care services and give guidance on transparency and declaring any interests.