

Guidance about Professional Behaviours and Fitness to Practise for Osteopathic Students

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Professional behaviour expected of osteopathic students

Introduction

1. Welcome to the profession of osteopathy. Osteopathy is one of the health professions regulated by law in the United Kingdom (UK). The General Osteopathic Council's role is to safeguard the health and wellbeing of the public as well as to promote the highest standards of osteopathic education.
2. The purpose of this booklet is to outline the professional behaviours expected of student osteopaths and to provide you with an outline of the role of the Osteopathic Educational Institution in relation to fitness to practise ensuring patient¹ safety. This booklet should be read in conjunction with the *Student Fitness to Practise Guidance for Osteopathic Educational Institutions* and our specific guidance about the management of health impairments and disability available on our website at www.osteopathy.org.uk, as well as the detailed local guidance in place at your Osteopathic Educational Institution (OEI) and other educational and clinical settings that you may work in during your training.
3. Patients and the public place trust in health professionals. In order to maintain this trust it is important for students of the health professions to behave in a way which will continue to promote the best care for patients and uphold the reputation of the profession.
4. Professional behaviour means demonstrating appropriate values, behaviours and relationships using appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes. It manifests itself as doing the right thing and behaving appropriately when no one is checking. Regulation begins with personal responsibility. As part of your education and training as a healthcare professional, you will continue to learn about professional behaviour and personal responsibility.
5. Your conduct in both your personal and professional life counts when considering professional behaviour. Throughout your course, the importance of conduct and approaching ethical issues in an appropriate way will be emphasised to you. You will be supported to learn effective professional behaviours throughout your 'Recognised Qualification' (RQ) course.
6. If there are concerns about fitness to practise, a fair and transparent process is followed. This process will comply with the guidance in the General Osteopathic Council's *Student Fitness to Practise Guidance for OEIs*.

¹ Throughout this guidance, the term patient includes patient, carer, parent, fellow students and staff.

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7. You will be expected to meet all the requirements set out in the *Osteopathic Practice Standards*² prior to the award of your RQ. These documents are available on the General Osteopathic Council (GOsC) website:
www.osteopathy.org.uk/practice/standards-of-practice/.

Health professional regulation

8. There are nine health professional regulators established by law in the UK. These are:
- a. The General Chiropractic Council which regulates chiropractors.
 - b. The General Dental Council which regulates dentists and dental care professionals.
 - c. The General Medical Council which regulates doctors.
 - d. The General Optical Council which regulates optometrists, dispensing opticians, student optometrists and certain premises.
 - e. The General Osteopathic Council which regulates osteopaths.
 - f. The General Pharmaceutical Council which regulates pharmacists, pharmacy technicians and pharmacy premises.
 - g. The Health Professions Council which regulates arts therapists; biomedical scientists; chiropodists; podiatrists; clinical scientists; dieticians; hearing aid dispensers; practitioner psychologists; occupational therapists; operating department practitioners; orthoptists; paramedics; physiotherapists; prosthetists; radiographers; and speech and language therapists.
 - h. The Nursing and Midwifery Council which regulates nurses and midwives.
 - i. The Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland which regulates pharmacists, pharmacy technicians and pharmacy premises in Northern Ireland.
9. The primary purpose of the regulation of these health professions by law is to ensure the safety and wellbeing of patients and the general public.

What does the General Osteopathic Council do?

² The Osteopathic Practice Standards are in force from 1 September 2012. All references to the Osteopathic Practice Standards should mean the Standard of Proficiency (2000) and the Code of Practice (2005) until 31 August 2012.

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10. The General Osteopathic Council (GOsC) regulates the practice of osteopathy in the UK. We do this by:
- Keeping the [Register](#) of all those permitted to practise osteopathy in the UK.
 - Working with the public and osteopathic profession to promote patient safety by:
 - Setting and monitoring the maintenance and development of [standards](#) of osteopathic training, practice and conduct.
 - Assuring the quality of osteopathic education and ensuring that osteopaths undertake [continuing professional development](#).
 - Helping patients with any [concerns or complaints](#) about an osteopath, with the power to remove from the Register any osteopaths who are unfit to practise.
11. By law osteopaths must be registered with the GOsC in order to practise in the UK.
12. In order to ensure that only those students who meet the required standards of competence, conduct and ethics are registered, the GOsC has published a suite of guidance relating to student fitness to practise and the management of health impairments and disability to support the effective development of policies and processes in OEIs in this area. The GOsC has a statutory role in registering osteopaths but does not provide a route of appeal in relation to OEI decisions about student fitness to practise. You should contact the OEI in order to establish your rights of appeal against decisions made.

What is the role of the Osteopathic Educational Institution in relation to student fitness to practise?

13. The role of the Osteopathic Educational Institution (OEI) is to ensure that only students who meet the required competence, conduct and ethical standards set out in the *Osteopathic Practice Standards* are awarded a 'Recognised Qualification' (RQ).
14. OEIs should encourage conversations about the management of health impairment and disability and suitable reasonable adjustments at the earliest opportunity to support students in achieving the required standards or in making decisions swiftly and fairly if reasonable adjustments cannot be made. Further guidance about this is available in our publications *Students with a Disability or Health Impairment: Guidance for Osteopathic Educational Institutions and Osteopathic Education and Training: Guidance for Applicants and Students with a Disability or Health Impairment* available on our website at www.osteopathy.org.

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15. The OEIs are responsible for developing and implementing how student fitness to practise policies and procedures are managed and incorporated into their courses. These policies will include the management of criminal convictions as well as other behaviour that may affect patient safety.
16. This GOsC guidance is designed to be an overarching framework to support this process – not a mechanism for appeal. The OEI policy about student fitness to practise should be regularly reviewed to ensure that it is consistent with the procedures actually in place at the OEI, the validating university and the clinical setting within which osteopathic care is delivered. These local OEI and validating university statements should be made clear to students at the outset of the course.
17. All OEIs are expected to have published information about the importance of professional behaviours, how these are taught and how learning opportunities are facilitated throughout the course.

Why do healthcare students have to meet high standards of professional behaviour?

18. The public, including relatives and friends, colleagues and staff, have certain expectations of healthcare professionals. This is because as a patient, most people will be vulnerable. Patients expect that healthcare professionals will treat them properly and will behave ethically. Trust is critically important to this therapeutic relationship.
19. The patient will often have the same expectations of and will put the same level of trust in a student as they would a fully-qualified health professional. This means that healthcare students are different to students of other disciplines. Professional behaviour in all aspects of life is important.
20. Regulation takes place at a number of different levels. The first level of regulation is the individual. It is crucial that individuals are aware of and abide by principles of regulation themselves. Healthcare professionals are in day-to-day contact with patients and this requires students to take responsibility to behave in a way that is in accordance with professional obligations and the expectations that the public have of healthcare professionals.
21. As you progress through your RQ course, you will learn the knowledge, skills and attitudes to support your practice alongside appropriate values, behaviours and relationships.
22. There is no comprehensive list of activities which lead to student fitness to practise procedures. This guidance attempts to set out positive principles which

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help students understand how to identify the 'right' behaviours in any given situation.

23. When considering your own behaviour and that of others, ask yourself will it:

- a. Impact on the perception of patient safety (including that of fellow students and staff)?
- b. Impact on the trust that the public places in the osteopathic profession that you wish to be a part of?

Standards

24. The standards expected of osteopathic students are set out in the *Osteopathic Practice Standards* as published on the GOSc website: www.osteopathy.org.uk/practice/standards-of-practice/. The RQ course will help you to gradually achieve the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours to demonstrate these standards to the appropriate level.

Common values of healthcare professionals

25. All healthcare regulators have subscribed to the following values:

- a. Be open with patients and clients and show respect for their dignity:
 - Listen to patients and clients.
 - Keep information about patients and clients confidential.
 - Make sure your beliefs and values do not prejudice your patients' or clients' care.
- b. Respect patients' and clients' right to be involved in decisions about their treatment and healthcare:
 - Provide information about patients' and clients' conditions and treatment options in a way they can understand.
 - Obtain appropriate consent before investigating conditions and providing treatment.
 - Ensure that patients have easy access to their health records.
- c. Justify public trust and confidence by being honest and trustworthy:
 - Act with integrity and never abuse your professional standing.
 - Never ask for, nor accept any inducement, gift, hospitality or referral which may affect, or could be seen to affect, your judgement.
 - Recommend the use of particular products or services only on the basis of clinical judgement and not commercial gain.

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- Declare any personal interests to those who may be affected.
- d. Provide a good standard of practice and care:
- Recognise and work within the limits of your knowledge, skills and experience.
 - Maintain and improve your professional knowledge, skills and performance.
 - Make records promptly and include all relevant information in a clear and legible form.
- e. Act quickly to protect patients, clients and colleagues from risk of harm:
- If either your own, or another healthcare worker's conduct, health or performance may place patients, clients or colleagues at risk.
 - If there are risks of infection or other dangers in the environment.
- f. Co-operate with colleagues from your own and other professions:
- Respect and encourage the skills and contributions which others bring to the care of patients and clients.
 - Within your work environment, support professional colleagues in developing professional knowledge, skills and performance.
 - Do not require colleagues to take on responsibilities that are beyond their level of knowledge, skills and experience.

26. These values are represented in the GOsC Osteopathic Practice Standards.

The Osteopathic Practice Standards

27. The professional behaviour of registered osteopaths is set out in the *Osteopathic Practice Standards* which combines the Standard of Proficiency and the Code of Practice into one streamlined document effective from 1 September 2012.
28. The GOsC *Osteopathic Practice Standards* set out the standards and principles of conduct of registered osteopathic practitioners that all osteopathic students should be familiar with at the earliest opportunity as part of the RQ course. The curriculum that you follow is designed to help you to meet these requirements in order to achieve your RQ enabling you to register with the General Osteopathic Council.
29. There are four themes covered in the *Osteopathic Practice Standards*. The standards are set out under each theme and reproduced below to assist you. There is also extensive guidance in the *Osteopathic Practice Standards* which

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helps to meaningfully interpret the standards including knowledge, skills, attitudes and values.

- a. Communication and patient partnership: The therapeutic relationship between osteopath and patient is built on trust and confidence. Osteopaths must communicate effectively with patients in order to establish and maintain an ethical relationship.
 - i. You must have well developed interpersonal communication skills and the ability to adapt communication strategies to suit the specific needs of a patient.
 - ii. Listen to patients and respect their concerns and preferences.
 - iii. Give patients the information they need in a way that they can understand.
 - iv. You must receive valid consent before treatment.
 - v. Work in partnership with patients to find the best treatment for them.
 - vi. Support patients in caring for themselves to improve and maintain their own health.
- b. Knowledge, skills and performance: Ethically an osteopath must possess the relevant knowledge and skills required to function as a primary healthcare professional.
 - i. You must understand osteopathic concepts and principles and apply them critically to patient care.
 - ii. You must have sufficient knowledge and skills to support your work as an osteopath.
 - iii. Recognise and work within the limits of your competence.
 - iv. Keep your professional knowledge and skills up to date.
- c. Safety and Quality in practice: Osteopaths must deliver high quality, safe, ethical and effective healthcare through evaluation and considered treatment approaches, which are clearly explained to the patient and respect patient dignity. Osteopaths are committed to maintaining and enhancing their practice to continuously deliver high-quality patient care.
 - i. You must be able to conduct an osteopathic patient evaluation sufficient to make a working diagnosis and formulate a treatment plan.

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- ii. You must be able to formulate and deliver a justifiable osteopathic treatment plan or an alternative course of action.
 - iii. Care for your patients and do your best to understand their condition and improve their health.
 - iv. Be polite and considerate with patients.
 - v. Acknowledge your patients' individuality in how you treat them.
 - vi. Respect your patients' dignity and modesty.
 - vii. Provide appropriate treatment and care.
 - viii. Ensure that your patient records are full, accurate and completed promptly.
 - ix. Act quickly to help patients and keep them from harm.
- d. Professionalism: Osteopaths must deliver safe and ethical healthcare by interacting with professional colleagues in a respectful and timely manner.
- i. You must consider the contributions of other healthcare professionals to ensure best patient care.
 - ii. You must respond effectively to requirements for the production of high-quality written material and data.
 - iii. You must be capable of retrieving, processing and analysing information as necessary.
 - iv. Make sure your beliefs and values do not prejudice your patients' care.
 - v. You must comply with equality and anti-discrimination laws.
 - vi. Respect your patients' right to privacy and confidentiality.
 - vii. Be open and honest when dealing with patients and colleagues and respond quickly to complaints.
 - viii. Support colleagues and co-operate with them to enhance patient care.
 - ix. Keep comments about colleagues or other healthcare professionals honest, accurate and valid.
 - x. Ensure that any problems with your own health do not affect your patients.
 - xi. Be aware of your role as a healthcare provider to promote public health.

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- xii. Take all necessary steps to control the spread of communicable diseases.
- xiii. Comply with health and safety legislation.
- xiv. Act with integrity in your professional practice.

30. Students should be aware of their obligations to patients from an early stage in their course. If you have concerns about the behaviour of a colleague, you should bring your concerns to the attention of a responsible person at the earliest opportunity to ensure that the concerns may be addressed at an early stage.

31. If you have a particular disability which means that reasonable adjustments may need to be made to the assessment of the standards in your case, you should discuss this with your OEI tutor. Further guidance and assistance about making reasonable adjustments to reach required standards is set out in our publications *Students with a disability or health impairment: Guidance for Osteopathic Educational Institutions* and *Osteopathic Education and Training: Guidance for Applicants and Students with a Disability or Health Impairment* available on our website at www.osteopathy.org.uk.

What support will I get to be fit to practise?

32. There should be a continual dialogue about professionalism which runs throughout your osteopathic pre-registration course. You should be taught and supported to learn professional behaviours. The teaching you receive should also emphasise the importance of being aware of patient expectations, the impact of behaviours on patients and colleagues and should focus on delivering to meet the requirements of the *Osteopathic Practice Standards* in force at the time.

33. It is also important for you to confide in your tutor if you have concerns about your own fitness to practise. This will help your tutor provide you with the right support and guidance to help you qualify as an osteopath.

34. When an OEI awards an RQ to you, they are confirming that you are capable of practising in accordance with the published ethical standards of the osteopathic profession.

Personal lives count too

35. As well as professional competence, personal lives count too. Issues in a student's private life may also impact on their fitness to practise. Examples of issues that may call fitness to practise into question include:

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- Aggressive behaviour.
 - Drug or alcohol misuse.
 - Dishonesty.
 - Failing to observe appropriate boundaries with patients, fellow students, staff and others.
 - Placing inappropriate photographs or postings on social media or social networking sites such as Facebook, or Twitter etc.
 - Criminal convictions
 - Treating friends and family unsupervised. There can be a risk to treating people unsupervised particularly if there is no supervised diagnosis made.
36. Further detailed guidance about how students might access support and reasonable adjustments is available in our guidance: *Students with a Disability or Health Impairment: Guidance for Osteopathic Educational Institutions* and *Osteopathic Education and Training: Guidance for Applicants and Students with a Disability or Health Impairment* available on our website at www.osteopathy.org.uk. Only if all reasonable adjustments have been tried but the student has still not met the requisite standard of professional competence will the behaviour potentially be subject to fitness to practise consideration.

Fitness to practise proceedings

37. OEIs must investigate and consider formal student fitness to practise proceedings if matters affecting student fitness to practise are brought to their attention. Our guidance *Student Fitness to Practise: Guidance for Osteopathic Educational Institutions* sets out further information about student fitness to practise proceedings.
38. The purpose of student fitness to practise policies and procedures is to ensure patient safety and that the trust placed by the public in the profession is upheld. They are not meant to be a punishment for particular behaviours. Insight into unprofessional behaviour is normally a pre-requisite to remaining a healthcare professional student. Whilst recommendation for expulsion is a possible outcome from student fitness to practise procedures, normally, the emphasis would be on supporting students to be fit to practise.
39. The GOSc's *Student Fitness to Practise Guidance for Osteopathic Educational Institutions* provides information on admissions processes, the threshold of student fitness to practise and the student fitness to practise process, including questions to consider when making findings and sanctions.

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Registration with the General Osteopathic Council

40. When you successfully complete your training, you will be awarded a Recognised Qualification (RQ). The RQ entitles the holder to apply for registration when other legal requirements related to good health and good character have been met alongside criteria relating to fees and professional indemnity insurance. Once registration is granted, you will be expected to obtain professional indemnity insurance before commencing practice.
41. The award of the RQ means that you are capable of practising to the required standards set out in our core documents, the *Osteopathic Practice Standards*.
42. When you are registered with the GOSc, you will be required to practise to the published standards of competence and conduct, currently set out in the *Code of Practice* and *Standard of Proficiency*. The Osteopathic Practice Standards (incorporating a revised *Code of Practice* and *Standard of Proficiency*) will come into force on 1 September 2012.
43. The award of an RQ will normally lead to registration with the GOSc, and is generally good evidence that you have satisfied the following requirements for registration:
 - a. Good health – is necessary to practise as an osteopath. Good health means that a person must be capable of safe and effective practice without supervision. It does not mean the absence of any disability or health condition. Many disabled people and those with long-term health conditions are able to practise with or without adjustments to support their practice. We require a health reference from a doctor. If the applicant is unable to obtain a reference from a doctor they should seek advice from GOSc.
 - b. Good character – is important as all healthcare professionals must be honest and trustworthy. Good character is based on a person's conduct, behaviour and attitude. It also takes account of any convictions and cautions that are not considered compatible with professional registration and that might bring the profession into disrepute. A person's character must be sufficiently good for them to be capable of safe and effective practice without supervision. We require a character reference from a professional person (for example an accountant, teacher dentist or similar) who has known you for four years (and is not a relative) on first registration.
 - c. Fitness to practise means having the skills, knowledge, good health and good character to do your job safely and effectively. Your fitness to

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practise as a student will be assessed throughout your pre-registration programme, and if there are ever concerns, these will be investigated and addressed by your Osteopathic Educational Institution (in conjunction with the validating university where appropriate).

44. Once registered, you will be expected to familiarise yourself with the *Continuing Professional Development Guidelines* available on our website (www.osteopathy.org.uk/practice/standards-of-practice/continuing-professional-development/) and to retain a folder of evidence to support the submission of a CPD Annual Summary Form each year before your re-registration.
45. Further information about student fitness to practise, registration, CPD or any other matter relating to registration and regulation is available from the General Osteopathic Council at standards@osteopathy.org.uk or by telephone to 020 7357 6655 x 235.

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