



**Council**  
**14 May 2015**  
**Public and Patient Perceptions Research**

<b>Classification</b>	Public
<b>Purpose</b>	For noting
<b>Issue</b>	A report on findings from recent patient and public research.
<b>Recommendation</b>	To note the findings of the 2014 GOsC Public Perceptions research and implications for osteopathic standards and public information provision.
<b>Financial and resourcing implications</b>	None arising from this paper
<b>Equality and diversity implications</b>	None arising from this paper
<b>Communications implications</b>	Proposed action is set out in the paper
<b>Annexes</b>	A and B <i>General Osteopathic Council: Public Perceptions Study</i> . YouGov, 2015 – full report and slides
<b>Author</b>	Brigid Tucker

## Background

1. The GOsC Communications and Engagement Strategy 2013-16 seeks to ensure that the organisation engages closely, listens, and builds relationships with patients and the public, in order that we understand and can respond to public needs and concerns. It is essential that the public has confidence in the quality and safety of osteopathic care.
2. The GOsC has some understanding of patients' expectations and perceptions of osteopathic care, primarily through our engagement activities and research, including a public expectations study conducted for the GOsC in 2011<sup>1</sup>. However anecdotal evidence suggests that the public may not be widely aware of the standards of osteopathic education, training and practice.
3. We therefore proposed further research into public and patient perceptions to ensure we understand stakeholder needs and help identify improvements in our public communications, inform guidance to registrants, and support the development of osteopathic practice standards.

### *Strategy for information gathering*

4. Over the course of 2014 we devised and conducted a two-phase programme of public perceptions research comprising both qualitative and quantitative methods, the key aims of which were to explore and ascertain:
  - perceptions and expectations of the profession and levels of knowledge of and trust in osteopathy
  - information needs and what information might be sought by those becoming a patient of an osteopath
  - expectations of the experience of being a patient of an osteopath
  - relative perceptions of professionalism and quality of care as compared to other healthcare providers
  - levels of awareness of regulation of osteopathy (particularly around protection from harm) and the response to the existence of the GOsC and the GOsC's role.
5. We are interested not only in the views and experiences of osteopathic patients, but wish also to better understand why people who have cause to see an osteopath might have chosen not to do so.

---

<sup>1</sup> Investigating osteopathic patients' expectations of osteopathic care: the OPEn project. University of Brighton, 2011 (<http://www.osteopathy.org.uk/resources/Research-and-surveys/GOsC-research/Osteopathic-patient-expectations-study>).

### **Phase 1: GOsC-Community Research public-patient focus groups 2014**

6. The first phase of our research constituted four focus group events conducted across the UK between February and June 2014, in Eastbourne, London, Warrington and Belfast, with the aim of testing some of the principles and assumptions on which our public protection services are founded. The groups comprised (a total of 42) adult participants aged 18-80 representing a diversity of backgrounds, and included both osteopathic patients and members of the public with no prior experience of osteopathy.

Themes explored through focus group discussion included:

- a. Perceptions of osteopaths in relation to other healthcare providers, in terms of safety, level of trust, standards of education and training and professionalism
  - b. Awareness and understanding of healthcare regulation
  - c. Information needs, especially the needs of new patients with no prior experience of osteopathy
  - d. Patient expectations of osteopaths at various stages of the patient journey
  - e. Attitudes to raising concerns about substandard osteopathic performance and/or conduct.
7. To ensure objectivity, Community Research, an independent market research company with wide experience of healthcare regulation, was commissioned to help develop the study, facilitate discussion and analyse feedback.
  8. A report on the findings of this qualitative research has been published<sup>2</sup> and is available on the GOsC website. The report was circulated to Council in July 2014.

### **Phase 2: GOsC-YouGov national public survey 2014**

9. The Community Research focus group report provides rich feedback, albeit from a small representative sample of patients and the public. The validity of these opinions required testing by means of a much larger, quantitative survey conducted on a national scale. Building on themes emerging from this qualitative work, the GOsC commissioned YouGov to test the opinion of UK adults, including a sample of osteopathic patients. This formed the second phase of our 2014 GOsC public perceptions research.

---

<sup>2</sup> *Public and patient perceptions of osteopaths and osteopathy*. Report on focus groups conducted for the GOsC by Community Research in February and June 2014. Community Research, June 2014 (<http://www.osteopathy.org.uk/news-and-resources/document-library/research-and-surveys/public-and-patient-perceptions-of-osteopaths-and-osteopathy>).

10. YouGov conducted an online survey, between 25/11/14 and 02/12/14, of a nationally representative sample of 1,566 members of the UK public, including 523 people who had visited an osteopath in the last 12 months.
11. The findings were independently analysed by YouGov and are presented in the study report: *General Osteopathic Council: Public Perceptions Study*. YouGov, April 2015. The YouGov report and accompanying slides are attached here as an Annex, and will be publicly available on the GOsC website.

### **Discussion of the findings of our public perceptions research**

12. Our public perceptions research explores a range of themes relevant to our work, including issues relating to confidence and trust, public information needs and what influences patient choice, the therapeutic encounter, perceptions of regulation and confidence in professional standards and our public protection functions. Some emerging themes are discussed here.

#### **1. Confidence and trust**

13. What determines patients' confidence in health professionals? Our research suggests that for the general public, the "top 3" most important factors are that the healthcare professional:

- holds a recognised level of education and training (94%)
- gives good quality advice and treatment (94%)
- is monitored by a regulatory body (92%).

Other factors cited as important include:

- professional indemnity insurance cover
- links to the NHS
- quality of the premises
- the presence of other care professionals in the same clinic.

14. Unsurprisingly, the public display significantly more confidence in healthcare services they access regularly and with which they are familiar, for example their GP or dentist. Where there is little knowledge and experience of a practice, confidence is correspondingly low.
15. This is well-illustrated in relation to osteopathy. Ranking against a range of other health services, osteopathic patients demonstrate very high levels of confidence in their osteopath (96%), exceeding even confidence in their GP (91%) and dentist (93%).

16. By contrast, in areas of the UK where there are low levels of knowledge about osteopathy and limited access to these services, as indicated in Northern Ireland, we find correspondingly low levels of public confidence in osteopathy.
17. Within the UK population generally (not osteopathic patients), confidence in receiving healthcare advice and treatment from an osteopath is relatively high: excluding those who 'don't know', 76% claiming that they would have 'a lot or a fair amount of confidence' in receiving treatment from an osteopath. The corresponding link between how much people know about the practice of osteopathy and confidence levels was clearly evident in the focus group discussions.
18. Our survey also shows that confidence in receiving treatment from an osteopath increases with household income (59% 50K or over), and links to the NHS, while significant for the general population and particularly those over the age of 55, this factor is of less importance to those on a higher household income. Osteopathic patients place slightly higher value on the health professional holding indemnity insurance.

#### *Regulated practice*

19. Our research shows that the public consider it important that health practice and professionals are 'regulated', a factor that significantly determines levels of trust and confidence – but our focus group discussions also revealed that the public have a limited concept of what this means.
20. GPs, dentists and pharmacists are widely recognised as regulated health professionals; where the public are less familiar with a practice, knowledge is predictably far less certain, and with regard to osteopaths, the public are at best equally divided on whether the practice is regulated in the UK<sup>3</sup>.
21. As a population, those with experience of osteopathy seem more live generally to the matter of healthcare regulation, which is consistent with indications that this is a factor taken into account when self-referring. However, while three out of four patients are aware that their osteopath is regulated (75%), as the regulator should we be concerned that as many as 25% of osteopathic patients are unaware of this fact?
22. Certainly this is a concern for the profession: word-of-mouth is an important source of new patients for osteopaths<sup>4</sup>, and our research firmly indicates that

---

<sup>3</sup> Awareness amongst the wider public regarding the "regulation" of healthcare professionals ranks osteopaths in fifth place (43%) from a list of 10 healthcare professions. When comparing broadly similar manual therapists or holistic approaches to treatment, respondents ranked osteopaths alongside chiropractors and physiotherapists in terms of trust-related factors, consistent with the Community Research focus group findings. The wider public are more aware that physiotherapists (63%) and psychologists (57%) are regulated, but less so that chiropractors are regulated (39%).

<sup>4</sup> The NCOR Standardised Data Collection project, 2010 estimates word-of-mouth recommendations account for 70% of osteopaths' new patients. The Institute of Osteopathy's 2014 Census of UK

regulated status influences patient choice of practitioner. Both in terms of increasing patient confidence and in improving general public perceptions of osteopathic practice, osteopaths would benefit from promoting heavily their regulated status.

### *Professional behaviour and values*

23. In order to meet public expectations, it is helpful to understand the public's perception of 'professional behaviour' in healthcare. In our research, being 'knowledgeable' is the word patients most commonly associate with a healthcare professional acting in a 'professional' way. Other frequently-mentioned words are 'caring', 'listening', 'understanding patients', 'confident' and providing 'good/appropriate advice'.

Typical quotes included:

*"Being knowledgeable and confident in their approach"*

*"Caring, appropriate, knowledgeable, qualified"*

*"A good listener, considerate of my individual needs; gives appropriate advice or treatment and knows when to ask for specialist advice/treatment"*.

### *Private practice*

24. The vast majority of osteopaths practise in the private sector, with patients self-referring. Our research sought to establish whether patients consider any particular factors when choosing a private practitioner, such as an osteopath, outside of the NHS.
25. In this context, we found that above all patients take account of the practitioner's professional qualifications (this has implications for the information patients expect to find on a public register, and is discussed further in paragraph 6.2). Whether the practitioner is a regulated health professional also influences the decision. The quality of the practitioner's advice and treatment is key and, again, patient choice will be heavily influenced by the experience and recommendations of others.
26. Osteopathic patients particularly value good communication skills and they seek practitioners that "explain the diagnosis clearly, speak in a way I can understand" and "take time to listen to you and understand your problem".

### **Observations and action**

- The GOsC public information leaflets, *What to expect from your osteopath* and *Standards of osteopathic care* provide clear information about osteopathic training and regulation, summarising more detailed information also available on

---

osteopaths reports that 98% of osteopaths say they rely on word of mouth to produce new patients. See <http://www.ncor.org.uk/practitioners/standardised-data-collection/>

the GOsC public website. We should continue to seek every opportunity to make this public information widely available and accessible, also encouraging osteopaths to offer the information via their websites and in practice (see also page 15: feedback from the Community Research focus groups, which tested public views on the content of the GOsC leaflets.)

- These findings confirm the importance of the GOsC 'Promoting registration' campaign, launched in early 2014, which encourages osteopaths to display posters and bespoke Certification marks, freely supplied to registrants by the GOsC, in order to maximise public awareness that osteopathy is a regulated practice and what this means in terms of patient safety and quality of care.
- The GOsC can support osteopaths and osteopathic organisations by identifying and recommending information that gives patients confidence. Via the **o** zone and our GOsC media, and our registration packs provided to new registrants, the GOsC can provide factsheets or frameworks for practice information that meets patients' needs.
- Patient perceptions of professional behaviours that engender trust and confidence reinforce our early thinking in relation to values-based practice and the foundation this may offer for re-examining how we frame osteopathic practice standards and their relevance and application in practice.

## 2. Public and patient information needs

### *When deciding whether to see an osteopath*

27. We are interested in what is the information a potential patient takes account of when forming a decision to see an osteopath.
28. Our research confirms that above all patients wish to understand the potential benefits of treatment (90%), and the risks (86%). We are told repeatedly that potential patients want information that will help them understand 'what an osteopath does'.
29. Potential patients are keen to know about the osteopath's professional standards (89%) and whether their practice is monitored by a regulator (84%); proof of registration is important (84%). That the practitioner is insured to practice is also of concern to most people (80%).
30. Clear information about the cost of treatment was considered crucial, particularly by those with no prior experience of osteopathy.
31. Most patients also take into account whether the osteopath is member of a professional network (81%), their length of training (76%), and patients expect to be assured that the practice operates a complaints procedure (68%).

### *Prior to a first appointment*

32. Many people visiting an osteopath for the first time have little idea what to expect, and from the focus group discussions we learned that this can be cause for considerable anxiety. Providing the information patients need in advance of their first appointment would help them feel less vulnerable.
33. Specifically, new patients want to know what the osteopath is likely to do – ‘what the treatment will involve’ (89%), and again emphatically what are the benefits (91%) and risks (88%). Understanding at the outset the treatment plan – the likely number of sessions and the associated costs – was essential for most people (88%).
34. Roughly two in three patients (64%) would also welcome advice on what to wear. Many (83%) were concerned to know what would happen if something went wrong – how would their concern be dealt with if they were not happy with their treatment?

### **Observations and action**

- Information provided by the osteopath in advance to a new patient is the first, crucial step in establishing a bond of trust and a relationship in which the patient feels they retain an adequate degree of control. The GOsC can support registrants by providing on the **o** zone a checklist of patient information needs as a guideline for developing practice information.
- The GOsC should continue to strongly encourage registrants to make available on their websites, PDF versions of the GOsC leaflet, *What to expect from your osteopath*, as this independent, impartial information will provide additional reassurance to prospective patients. This also provides information about osteopathic standards and regulation, which we know to be important influences on public confidence.
- For patients, understanding the potential benefits of osteopathic treatment is essential. Here the osteopath’s professional judgement is important: information must be honest, factual and compliant with the Advertising Standards Authority Code of Advertising, which requires the promotion of healthcare benefits to be evidence-based (see also page 14 – iO role in promoting benefits.)

### **3. The therapeutic encounter**

35. We are interested to understand how patients perceive the therapeutic encounter with an osteopath and what factors are likely to produce a positive experience.
36. It is osteopathic practice to spend time taking a detailed case history, and our research confirms that this aspect of the consultation is especially valued by osteopathic patients, reinforcing a positive sense of being ‘listened to’. Almost as important for osteopathic patients is the sense that the options for treatment



have been thoroughly discussed – this is particularly important for new patients who have yet to develop their trust in a practitioner.

37. Osteopathic patients have a higher expectation of receiving a diagnosis than patients generally in our study, and we might speculate that many osteopathic patients have failed to establish the cause of their problem through other treatments and have now turned their expectations to osteopathy.
38. Osteopathic patients give a clear indication that the other factors that produce a positive therapeutic experience are the degree to which the osteopath makes them feel at ease, the sense that they have been listened to, and if their views have been taken into account. The quality of advice given about aftercare is also important. Osteopathic patients also value a holistic approach to treatment.
39. Osteopathic patients have significantly more confidence that they will receive care of this quality than patients' confidence in the health system generally.
40. Those with no prior experience of osteopathy stress the need for reassurance not only that the osteopath will discuss thoroughly with them the options for treatment, but that the practitioner will also liaise with the patient's GP, and provide clear information about costs of treatment. Information about the risks of treatment is also vital in building trust.
41. On these factors, the dissonance between those with experience of osteopaths and those with none suggests that as patients become familiar with osteopathy/their osteopath, concerns about GP oversight, treatment risks and costs diminish, as trust grows.

### **Observations and action**

- Patient confidence in their osteopath is determined by the degree to which the patient feels involved in decisions about their care and trust that the osteopath has their best interests at heart. The factors that establish and maintain trust need to be well-understood by practitioners and embedded in practice. The strong evidence emerging from this research will inform our review and promotion of the *Osteopathic Practice Standards* and our work around values-based practice.
- The GOsC can support registrants by providing on the **o** zone a checklist of patient information needs as a guideline for osteopaths developing practice information.

### **4. Listening to patients**

42. We are interested to understand how patients feel their views should influence the quality and standards of care they receive.

*How important is providing feedback?*

43. Osteopaths are encouraged to seek feedback on their practice from patients as an important factor in appraising and improving the quality of the care they provide. But how willing are patients to give the practitioner feedback on their patient experience? Our study finds that nine out of ten osteopathic patients (91%) consider their feedback important to the osteopath's practice.

*How do people prefer to give feedback on their care?*

44. One in two patients (47%) would be happy to give feedback on their experience face-to-face with the osteopath, particularly those in the older age ranges (55+). A significant number (35%) would prefer to complete an online survey at home. Only one in ten (10%) favour an anonymous feedback form in the practice, and just 6% would prefer to complete an online survey in the practice.
45. The public generally prefer giving feedback anonymously, which suggests that osteopathic patients feel more comfortable and confident about openly discussing the quality of their treatment directly with the osteopath.

**Observations and action**

- GOsC proposals for new osteopathic CPD requirements include recommendations that registrants routinely gather objective feedback on their practice from patients. Our findings strongly confirm patients' willingness to provide feedback, and our findings go further to suggest there is even a clear expectation of being invited to share their views. Key to this is an awareness of patient preferences around providing feedback and evidence from this study can usefully be shared with registrants to guide their development of feedback mechanisms.

**5. Mistakes and the 'duty of candour'**

46. Professional standards in healthcare see renewed emphasis on the health professional's 'duty of candour' and the obligation to be open and honest with patients. We asked patients if they would wish to know when their osteopath had made a mistake in their care, regardless of the severity of the incident.
47. The vast majority of patients (83%) believe they should always be told when there has been a mistake in their care – a small proportion only (15%) feel this may depend on what has happened.

**Observations and action**

- This supports feedback we have gathered in focus group discussions with the public and patients regarding candour (including a dedicated 'candour' focus group exercise on 3 December 2014), and provides evidence for strengthening our standards and guidance in this regard. A further facilitated 'candour' focus group on 3 June 2015 will explore these views with osteopaths to identify obstacles and inform our development of standards and guidance.

## 6. The GOsC and professional standards

### *Sources of information on standards and safety*

48. We are interested to know where the public expect to find information relating to the safety of osteopathic practice, practice standards and practitioner competence, and the regulation of osteopathy. Our survey confirms that the general public source this information primarily via general internet searching (public 53%; osteopathic patients 68%), the NHS Choices website (42%) or via their GP practice (47%). The pivotal role of the GP in informing and guiding patient choices was especially evident in the Community Research focus group discussion.
49. Almost half (46%) of patients expected their osteopathic practice to provide information about standards of practice.
50. Among osteopathic patients, there is a reasonably high awareness of the GOsC as an information source (65%), but public awareness generally of the GOsC, and any health regulator, is very low: just one in three (36%) respondents suggesting the GOsC as a source of information regarding osteopathic standards. Discussion in the focus groups revealed a widely-held 'need to know' attitude: 'as a regulated practice, a regulatory body must exist – when I need it, I'll Google it'.

### **Observations and action**

- This underlines the importance for the GOsC of ensuring our public website performs well in internet searches across major search engines. Providing online the information the public need and ensuring this is simple to navigate is vital. Feedback from focus group participants on this was very positive. We will continue to ensure our website encourages user feedback supported by regular usability testing.
- The GOsC encourages osteopaths to establish professional relations with local GP practices, and as far as possible we will provide GOsC patient information leaflets for display in health centres and GP practices, where this can be arranged. We are investigating the use of direct marketing distribution networks used by other health regulators to place public information in GP surgeries and health centres, however the potential benefit in relation to the investment would have to be carefully weighed.

### *Information available on the public Register of osteopaths*

51. The information provided on the GOsC online public Register of osteopaths is significantly more detailed than many other healthcare registers. Our view is that this is helpful both to patients and registrants, given the private sector nature of most osteopathic services and the fact that the vast majority of osteopathic patients self-refer. Our survey sought to ascertain what register information was most valued by the public and patients.

52. Respondents confirmed that aside from practitioners' contact details (86%) and opening hours (77%), the information on a public register considered most important includes disciplinary details (79%) and, notably, the osteopaths' specialist interests (82%; osteopathic patients 90%). Illustrating this, the Community Research focus group discussions found that when choosing an osteopath, people would broadly make decisions based on practitioners' qualifications.

### Observations and action

- Our public Register information meets the public need in every way but this last. We are not able to display information about osteopaths' specialist interests or expertise (this is not information we hold), but findings suggest there is a very significant public demand for this (echoed also in patient/public queries received directly by the GOsC). The osteopathic profession's development agenda, led by the Osteopathic Development Group, is currently exploring the most appropriate ways of assessing and recognising advanced or specialist practice, potentially with a view to meeting this need in the future<sup>5</sup>.

*What gives assurance that osteopaths remain up to date and fit to practise?*

53. We noted a general public assumption that as a regulated practice, osteopaths' standards of performance are in some way monitored by a regulator, and we explored the factors that give patients assurance of safety.
54. For the wider public, being subject to inspections by an independent regulator (61%) provides assurances that osteopaths remain up to date and fit for practise, followed by proof of undertaking a set number of CPD hours (40%), and having to go through an annual appraisal with a manager or more senior professional (29%).
55. Focus group discussion of these options concluded that although practice inspections are desirable as a mechanism for quality assurance, it was recognised that this approach was unlikely to be financially viable, with the cost burden falling on the patient.

### Observations and action

- Our current proposals for enhancements to the GOsC's mandatory CPD requirements for osteopaths includes a system of regular peer review appraisal, which goes some way to meeting public expectations of regulatory standards. The GOsC will wish to note also this feedback within our current public consultation on CPD requirements and assuring osteopaths' continuing fitness to practise.

---

<sup>5</sup> Further information on the work of the Osteopathic Development Group (ODG) and on the ODG Advanced Practice project can be found at: <http://www.osteopathy.org/for-osteopaths/development-of-the-profession/advanced-clinical-practice-acp-project/>

*Awareness of osteopathic standards of training, registration and practice*

56. The majority (68%) of those surveyed who were not osteopathic patients were broadly unaware of general facts regarding osteopathy and its regulation; the Community Research focus group discussion linked the low level of public awareness with the relatively small size of the profession and its limited NHS penetration.
57. Of the population who have experience of osteopaths, awareness of regulation and training is better, roughly two out of three (64%) being aware that osteopaths must be registered to practise in the UK. Of greater concern is the indication that fewer than half of osteopathic patients (42%) are aware that there is a publicly available register that allows them to check whether an osteopath is qualified to treat them; only 8% of non-patients were aware of this. Although patients consider professional indemnity insurance important in the private health sector, barely half (55%) are aware that osteopaths offer this protection.

**Observations and action**

- There are indications here that as many as one osteopathic patient in three is unclear about osteopaths' registration requirements and how these protect and benefit the public. The GOsC's current 'Promoting registration' campaign, which includes public information posters for display in osteopathic practices, provides simple information that addresses this problem, and equips patients to share information when recommending a practitioner. We will flag this evidence with registrants to highlight the benefit to all of the 'Promoting registration' campaign.

*Confidence in the resolution of complaints*

58. Osteopathic patients, who are more likely to be aware that osteopathy is regulated and be exposed to information about the GOsC, are reasonably certain that mechanisms exist for the resolution of concerns, three in four (74%) expressing confidence that the GOsC would adequately investigate and address patient concerns/complaints about an osteopath.
59. In the general population, as respondents became aware through the course of the YouGov survey that osteopathy is a regulated practice, confidence levels show a corresponding rise (e.g. 58% expressing confidence that if they raised concerns with the GOsC about an osteopath, this would be properly investigated).

*Barriers to making a complaint*

60. Perceptions of what might stop a patient from making a complaint if they were dissatisfied with an osteopath's care or conduct, focus on the problem of the concern being considered 'too small or minor' (27%) and 'not knowing the mechanisms in place to go about complaining/who to complain to' (17%).

For the majority (34%), however, nothing would stop them from making a complaint if this was felt necessary.

61. In stark contrast, focus group discussion revealed a strong tendency among patients to “walk away from a problem”, seeking care elsewhere. The majority view was that they would be inclined to flag a concern only if they thought that the osteopath posed a significant risk to other patients.

### Observations and action

- Patients should have the information they need to help them decide on the best course of action when they experience sub-standard treatment and this expectation is explicit in Standard D7 of the *Osteopathic Practice Standards*. This is reinforced by our survey, which finds that 65% of respondents consider it important that patients are provided with information about what action they can take if they have concerns about the care they receive, and echoes the 2011 Osteopathic Patient Expectations (OPEN) Study<sup>6</sup> in which respondents were emphatic that osteopathic practices should make complaints procedures evident in their patient information. We need to ensure registrants understand how important this information is to public trust and confidence in osteopathic care.

### General reflections the regulator and/or the profession:

- In this 2014 Public Perceptions research, osteopathic patients demonstrate very high levels of confidence in their osteopath, echoing the findings of the 2011 Osteopathic Patient Expectations Study<sup>7</sup>, in which 96% of patients indicated satisfaction with their osteopathic care. Many with experience of osteopathy will recommend the treatment or their osteopath to others – advocacy was a prevalent theme in the focus group discussions. For the regulator, this evidence is a reassuring indicator of good standards of care. It should be noted, however, that in focus group feedback, osteopathic patients reported inconsistent quality of care between osteopaths, many patients stating that they had tried a number of osteopaths before identifying a practitioner who met their expectations.
- Low levels of knowledge about osteopathy correspond with low levels of public confidence in osteopathy. The public want to know “what osteopaths do”, and how this relates to other manual therapies. This is a challenge for the profession as a whole, and the regulator.
- Potential patients want to understand above all the benefits and risks of osteopathic treatment. Developing a better understanding is a priority for the profession, and important work in this area is led by the Institute of Osteopathy and the National Council for Osteopathic Research (NCOR). NCOR, building on the GOsC Adverse Events work, has developed for osteopaths extensive resources around evidence and risk information for patients.

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

- One in four osteopathic patients is unaware that their osteopath is regulated, yet regulation is key to public confidence in healthcare. We need to renew our efforts to encourage osteopaths to recognise the importance of ensuring all their patients – and potential patients – are aware that osteopathy is a regulated practice. This fact, and the low level of wider public awareness of osteopathy as a regulated practice, justifies the importance of the GOsC's current 'Promoting registration' campaign.
- The Community Research focus group events provided a forum for testing and evaluating the quality and suitability of the information provided in the GOsC public information leaflets, 'What to expect from your osteopath' and 'Standards of osteopathic care'. Feedback from both osteopathic patients and, more emphatically, those with no experience and limited knowledge of osteopath care, was highly positive. The latter group especially confirming that the information provided increased significantly their confidence and trust in osteopathic care. We should continue to seek every opportunity to make this public information widely available and accessible, also encouraging osteopaths to offer the information via their websites and in practice.
- Patients tell us they would like to find public information about osteopathy, of the kind produced by the GOsC, in their GP practice. How might this be achieved? Do we want to say this – or perhaps an observation about the central role of the GP in influencing patient choice and confidence in relation to quality or care?

### Sharing findings and next steps

62. Together with the important 2011 GOsC Patient Expectations study<sup>8</sup>, the findings of our 2014 Public and Patient Perceptions research, both the Community Research qualitative feedback and the YouGov national survey, represent a rich resource, not just for the GOsC but for the wider profession.
63. Full study reports will be openly available on the GOsC website, and in addition we will be seeking opportunities to share and discuss the insight gained from this work with osteopathic partner organisations, and directly with registrants.
64. Linking this evidence with that arising from other current GOsC research, including the McGivern work relating to promoting effective regulation<sup>9</sup>, provides a strong evidential basis for our policy and standards development, and for shaping public information. Producing public information that closely meets patient needs is in the best interests of all, and could do much to increase public confidence in osteopathic practice.

---

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*

<sup>9</sup> *Exploring and explaining the dynamics of osteopathic regulation, professionalism and compliance with standards in practice.* McGivern G, et al <http://www.osteopathy.org.uk/news-and-resources/research-surveys/gosc-research/research-to-promote-effective-regulation/>

65. We plan to use the findings to shape guides and resources for registrants, available on the **o** zone, from which osteopaths can draw content when developing their practice information. This should be promoted by the GOsC as a key resource for those just setting up in practice in particular and we will highlight this in our guidance for new registrants. We will look to share findings and learning with osteopathic education providers to inform the training of students.
66. Key messages will be reported in our communications over coming months (A lead article in the osteopath, April/May 2014, highlighted the findings of the Community Research qualitative study). The forthcoming June/July 2015 issue will lead on the YouGov survey findings.
67. There has been interest in our public perceptions research among other health regulators and the Professional Standards Authority, and we shall share findings through our Inter-regulatory groups for Research and Public-Patient Engagement. We experience similar challenges in relation to the low public profile of health regulators and the content and signposting of public information regarding standards of practice and raising concerns.

**Recommendation:** to note the findings of the 2014 GOsC Public Perceptions research and implications for osteopathic standards and public information provision.