



Report prepared for the General Osteopathic Council

Public Perceptions Study

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Introduction

1 Background

- 1.1.1 This report presents the findings of a study commissioned by the General Osteopathic Council (GOsC) to investigate public perceptions of the osteopathic profession. The aim of this study was to provide the GOsC with insight into public and patient perceptions of osteopathic care and regulation.
- 1.1.2 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 the GOsC understands and can respond to public needs and concerns.
- 1.1.3 The GOsC has gained some understanding of patients' expectations and perceptions of osteopathic care, primarily through GOsC engagement activities and research, notably a public expectations study conducted for the GOsC in 2011.
- 1.1.4 However, to add further depth to the GOsC's understanding, this survey was commissioned to explore public perceptions in more detail. Prior to this survey, and to inform the survey development, four focus group events were conducted across the UK between February and June 2014. A range of important findings emerged from this qualitative research that informed the development of the survey analysed here. Key findings included:
- Three factors were frequently inter-related and very central to trust in health professionals: (i) Professionalism (ii) Strong regulation; and (iii) Close links with the NHS.
 - Osteopaths tended to be grouped alongside chiropractors and physiotherapists in relation to these various trust-related factors.
 - Participants who had no experience of osteopathy tended to have concerns about both osteopathy's efficacy and its professional standing.
 - There was very little awareness about the training that osteopaths are required to undergo to be eligible to practise.
 - There was a general assumption that osteopathy is a regulated profession, but very little knowledge of what this regulation involves or how stringent it is.

- A key trigger to visiting an osteopath was that of having received a recommendation to do so.
- Trusted sources of information about osteopathy tended to be a recommendation from either a GP or a friend/family member.
- When choosing an osteopath, participants said they would make a decision based on a range of factors including their judgement about the level of qualifications and training, location, personal recommendations and their first impressions.
- Seeking an osteopath would mostly be undertaken via seeking out personal recommendations; although there was also mention of searching online.
- Awareness of the GOsC Register of practitioners was very limited.
- Key information requirements / questions that patients would have at this stage of the patient journey were as follows:

What exactly is likely to happen at the visit?

Will the treatment hurt / make me worse?

How much will the treatment cost and will it represent value for money?

- Key expectations of osteopaths included:
 - Clear communication and explanations.
 - Consideration of privacy and dignity requirements.
 - Close involvement in treatment plan and decisions.
 - An honest initial assessment of the patient's problem and the prognosis.
 - Respecting confidentiality.
- Information on the complaints process was felt to be very important. However, many participants said they would only complain about something if it was a serious concern and/or there was a perception of risk to other members of the public.

1.1.5 As these views were collected from a limited number of people, the key aim of this study was to test out elements of the feedback to understand how widely these views are held within the general public. The conclusions section of the report summarises the survey findings and presents them in relation to the qualitative research.

2 Guidance on analysis

2.1.1 Throughout the report, 'osteopathic patients' are defined as people who have visited an osteopath in the last 12 months, unless otherwise stated. Additionally, a statistically significant difference – which refers to a difference that is outside of the 'margin of error' and can therefore be considered statistically relevant – is represented by a red circle. This is considered statistically significant and identified a true difference in opinion – however, this may or may not be considered significant in terms of future policy and/or strategy.

2.1.2 Throughout the report significant differences between groups within the UK public are highlighted to show where views differ by key demographics.

3 Sample profile

3.1.1 A nationally representative survey of 1,043 members of the UK public was carried out. In addition to this a boosted sample of people who have visited an osteopath in the last 12 months were surveyed to achieve a total base of 523 UK adults who have done so. Fieldwork was undertaken between 25th November and 2nd December, 2014. All the research was undertaken online by YouGov using the YouGov research panel.

3.1.2 The table below shows the demographic profile of general public respondents and those who are osteopathic patients who responded

Gender	UK public	Osteopathic patients
Male	509	210
Female	534	313
Social grade		
ABC1	592	404
C2DE	451	119
Age		
18-24	124	3
25-34	115	21
35-44	136	50
45-54	186	87
55+	482	362
Region		
North	213	64
Midlands	148	56
East	91	76
London	160	86
South	226	178
Wales	39	26
Scotland	141	37
Northern Ireland	25	64
Total	1,043	523¹

¹ This is a boosted sample of 523 osteopathic patients. Eighteen people within the UK public sample had visited an osteopath in the last 12 months. We added 505 people who had visited an osteopath in the past 12 months to give a total of 523 patients for analysis purposes.

Section 1: Perceptions of healthcare professions/professionals

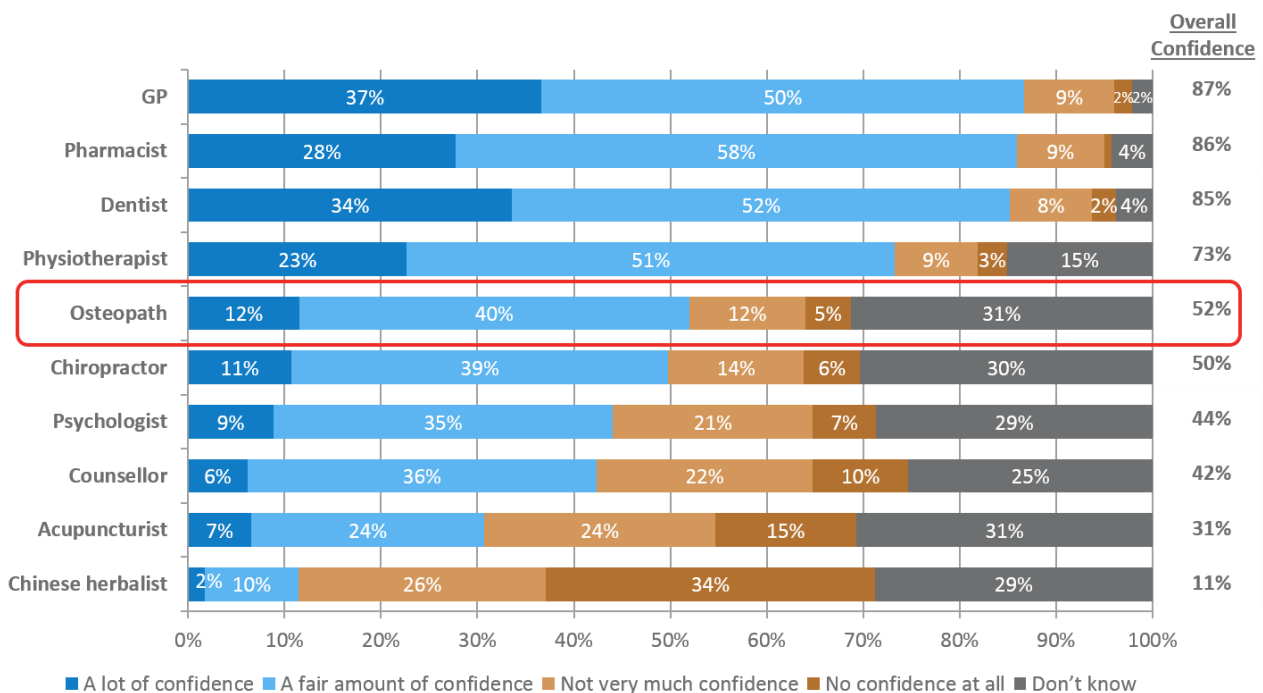
The first section of this report looks at the perceptions of confidence and trust that the UK public and osteopathic patients have in a range of health professionals. It also examines the characteristics of a ‘health professional’ and perceptions of regulation in healthcare.

4 Confidence in health professionals

4.1.1 The UK public report that they have the highest levels of confidence in the more familiar ‘mainstream’ health professionals: GPs, pharmacists, dentists and physiotherapists. Public confidence in osteopaths falls in the middle of the range; British adults are more likely to have higher confidence in these ‘mainstream’ professionals than in osteopaths, and less likely to have higher confidence in arguably less familiar professionals like chiropractors, counsellors and acupuncturists.

4.1.2 Roughly half of the UK public (52%) indicate that they have at least a fair amount of confidence in receiving healthcare advice and/or treatment from an osteopath. Among these individuals, a smaller proportion (12%) say they have a lot of confidence.

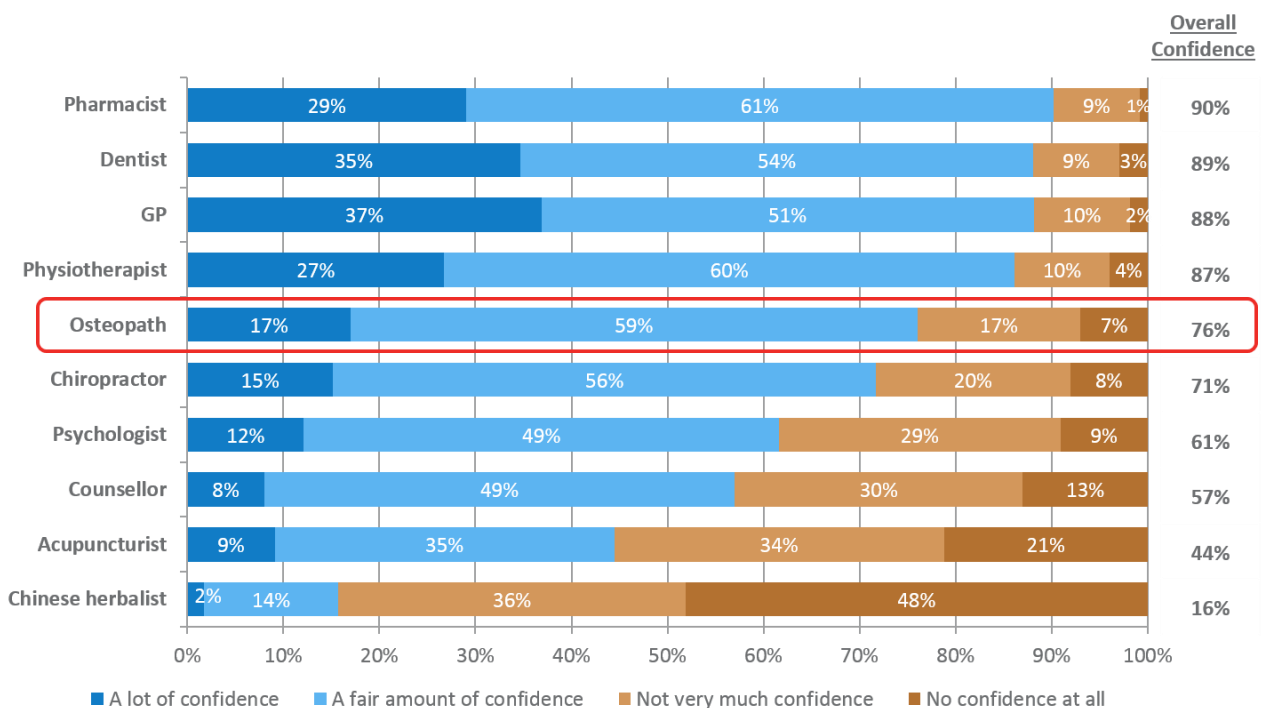
Figure 1: Confidence in a range of health professionals – UK public



Base: All UK adults (n=1,043)

- 4.1.3 People with a higher level of awareness of osteopathy are particularly likely to have a lot of confidence in osteopaths (22% compared with 7% of those who have little to no awareness).
- 4.1.4 Conversely, young adults aged 18-24 are more likely than those in older age groups to have no confidence at all in osteopaths (10% compared with 4% on average among adults aged 25+).
- 4.1.5 However, a sizeable proportion of the UK public report they ‘don’t know’ how much confidence they have in receiving treatment from arguably less familiar types of health professional, including osteopaths, which demonstrates a lack of awareness.
- 4.1.6 Figure 2 shows the levels of confidence that the UK public have in health professionals excluding those who said they ‘don’t know’. Osteopaths continue to rank as fifth out of ten in terms of public confidence, with three quarters (76%) of the population indicating they have at least a fair amount of confidence in them.

Figure 2: Confidence in a range of health professionals (excl. ‘Don’t know’) – UK public



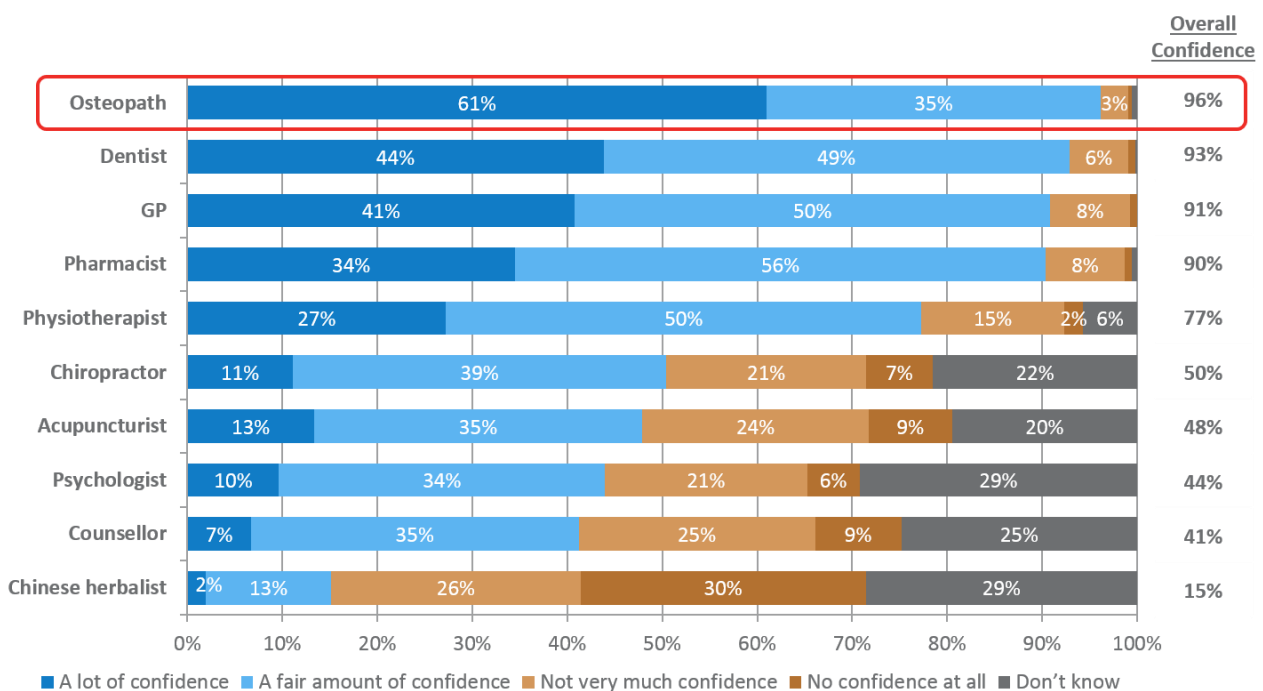
Base: All UK adults (n=1,043)

Note: Figures for don't know have not been shown

4.1.7 Osteopathic patients (defined as those who have visited in the past 12 months), demonstrate very high levels of confidence in the advice and treatment provided by osteopaths. Virtually all patients (96%) indicate that they have a fair amount or a lot of confidence in osteopaths, with the majority (61%) saying they have a lot of confidence. Patients' confidence levels are in fact marginally higher for osteopaths than for any other more 'mainstream' health professional listed, including dentists, GPs and pharmacists.

4.1.8 However, patients' confidence levels in other health professionals – excluding osteopaths – are relatively consistent with those of the general public.

Figure 3: Confidence in a range of health professionals – Osteopathic patients



Base: All osteopathic patients (n=523)

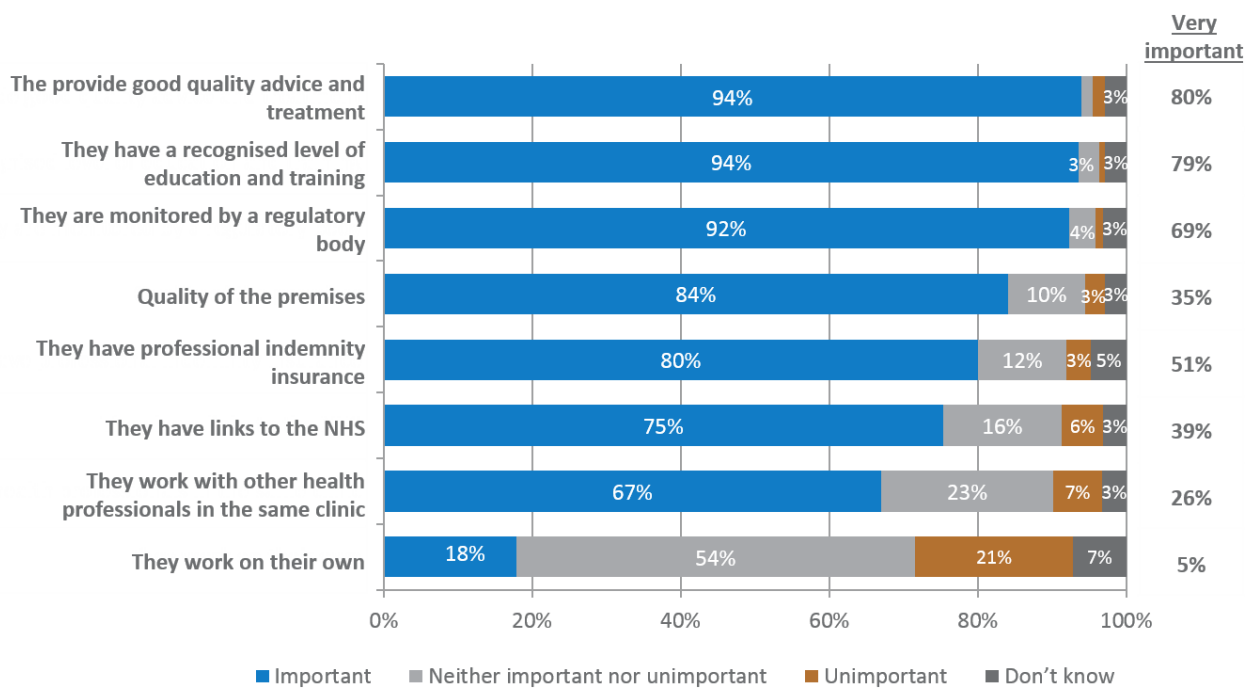
5 Confidence in receiving advice and treatment from health professionals

5.1.1 The UK public indicate that the most important factors in giving them confidence in receiving advice and/or treatment from a healthcare professional are good quality advice and treatment, a recognised level of education and training, and that the professional is monitored by a regulatory body.

5.1.2 Relatively less importance is placed on more specific factors such as professional indemnity insurance, having links to the NHS, quality of the premises, and working with other professionals in the same clinic (very important: 51%, 39%, 35% and 26% respectively).

5.1.3 Osteopathic patients further support this prioritisation, also reporting that the top three most important factors in giving them confidence in healthcare professionals are good quality advice and treatment, a recognised level of education and training, and being monitored by a regulatory body (very important: 90%, 87% and 72% respectively).

Figure 4: Important factors in giving confidence in health professionals – UK public



Base: All UK adults (n=1,043)

5.1.4 Among the general public, older adults aged 55+ are more likely than younger adults to feel that many of the factors listed are very important, including that professionals have a recognised level of education and training (86% compared with 79% overall) and that they provide good quality advice and treatment (87% compared with 80% overall).

- 5.1.5 When considering the three factors most important in giving them confidence in treatment from a healthcare professional, the UK public and osteopathic patients consistently rank education and training (66% and 80% respectively), quality of advice and treatment (64% and 79% respectively), and regulation (63% and 67% respectively) most often.
- 5.1.6 Otherwise, links to the NHS are particularly important to the UK public, with one quarter (26%) ranking this in their top three, while osteopathic patients place higher value on indemnity insurance (23%).

6 Perceptions of a 'professional'

- 6.1.1 When asked spontaneously which words or phrases they would use to describe someone in healthcare acting in a 'professional' way, the UK public mention 'knowledgeable' more than any other term. Other words they often associate with being 'a professional' are 'caring', 'patient', 'understanding', 'good' and 'advice'.
- 6.1.2 Some key quotes include:
- "A good listener, someone who instils confidence, has time"
 - "Caring, appropriate, knowledgeable, qualified"
 - "Appropriate level of education and experience, treatment or medication thoroughly explained and justified, good monitoring of progress of treatment, overseen by official body, understands what NHS offers but also alternatives"
- 6.1.3 Osteopathic patients are consistent with the general public, showing that these views are widely held outside of those people who have visited an osteopath: patients also mention 'knowledgeable' more than any other term when describing someone in healthcare acting in a 'professional' way.
- 6.1.4 Key quotes from osteopathic patients regarding words or phrases they would use to describe someone in healthcare acting in a 'professional' way include:
- "Being knowledgeable and confident in their approach"
 - "Empathic, organised, knowledgeable, educated, up to date with current medication/ treatments"

- “Good listener; considerate of my individual needs; gives appropriate advice or treatment and knows when to ask for specialist advice/treatment”

7 Trust in private health professionals

7.1.1 Trust in private healthcare professionals is driven by perceptions of a high level of qualification above all else. Being well qualified is the one factor that a majority of the UK public report is most important in giving them trust towards a private health professional.

7.1.2 Nearly half also report that the quality of advice and treatment (48%) and being monitored by a regulatory body (47%) are important factors in enabling this trust.

7.1.3 Conversely, being well presented/dressed (5%), knowing that there is action they can take to make a complaint (7%) and the quality of premises (8%) are relatively less important to the public, being mentioned by less than 10%.

Figure 5: Important factors that enable trust in private health professionals

	UK public	Patients
They are well qualified	61%	66%
Quality of advice and treatment	48%	64%
They are monitored by a regulatory body	47%	43%
They have good communication skills (i.e. they explain the diagnosis clearly, speak in a way I can understand)	36%	47%
They take time to listen to you and understand your problem	34%	48%
They have good interpersonal skills (i.e. they treat me with dignity, listen to what I say, put me at ease)	32%	42%
Knowing they update their skills regularly	25%	33%
They are a member of a professional network	25%	30%
They have been recommended by someone you trust	24%	34%
Knowing that I will be involved in decisions about my treatment	24%	28%
Value for money	17%	11%
They will treat my details confidentially	17%	17%
They have close links with the NHS	15%	8%
Quality of the premises	8%	5%
Knowing that there is action I can take if I have any concerns or wish to make a complaint	7%	5%
They are well presented/dressed	5%	5%
Don't know	4%	0%
Not applicable – none of these factors are important in giving me trust towards a private healthcare professional	3%	0%
Other	1%	1%

Base: All UK adults (n=1,043); All osteopathic patients (n=523)

7.1.4 Osteopathic patients are particularly likely to report that the quality of advice and treatment is important in giving them trust in private health professionals (64% compared with 48% among the UK public). This could potentially be attributed to an increased exposure to healthcare services from private professionals and therefore more developed expectations.

8 Regulation

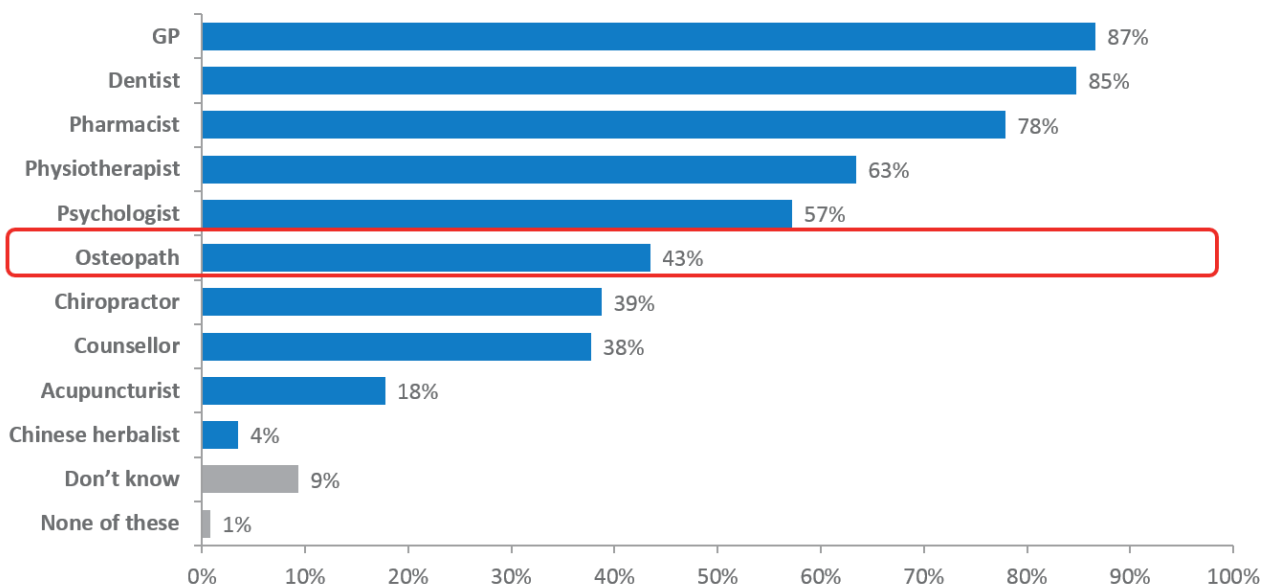
8.1.1 When prompted with a list of health professionals, less than half (43%) of UK adults indicate that they think osteopaths are regulated.

8.1.2 Much like their ratings of confidence levels and supporting anecdotal evidence, GPs (87%), dentists (85%) and pharmacists (78%) are most widely recognised as regulated health professionals. Osteopaths are less frequently thought to be regulated than these ‘mainstream’ professionals, but more frequently than other more ‘alternative’ professionals, such as counsellors (38%), acupuncturists (18%) and Chinese herbalists (4%), which is also consistent with earlier findings based on perceptions of confidence.

8.1.3 Public confidence in health professionals closely mirrors perceptions of regulation, which could indicate that being regulated is an important factor in determining the level of confidence that the public have in a health professional.

8.1.4 UK adults with higher levels of awareness of osteopathy are also more likely than those with little to no awareness to think that osteopaths are regulated (50% compared with 31%).

Figure 6: Awareness of the regulation of health professionals – UK public

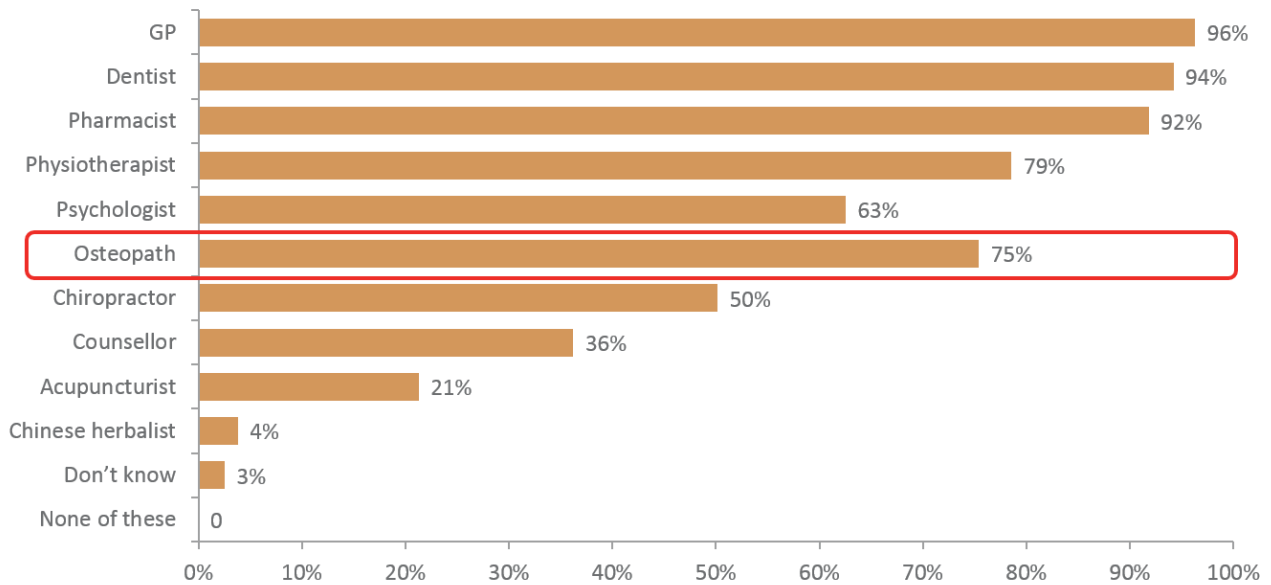


Base: All UK adults (n=1,043)

8.1.5 Overall, osteopathic patients demonstrate an increased awareness of healthcare regulation.

8.1.6 Three quarters (75%) of osteopathic patients are aware that osteopaths are regulated. However, this implies that one-in-four patients does not know their osteopath is regulated, which shows a need to increase the awareness of regulation among patients.

Figure 7: Awareness of regulation of health professionals – Osteopathic patients



Base: All osteopathic patients (n=523)

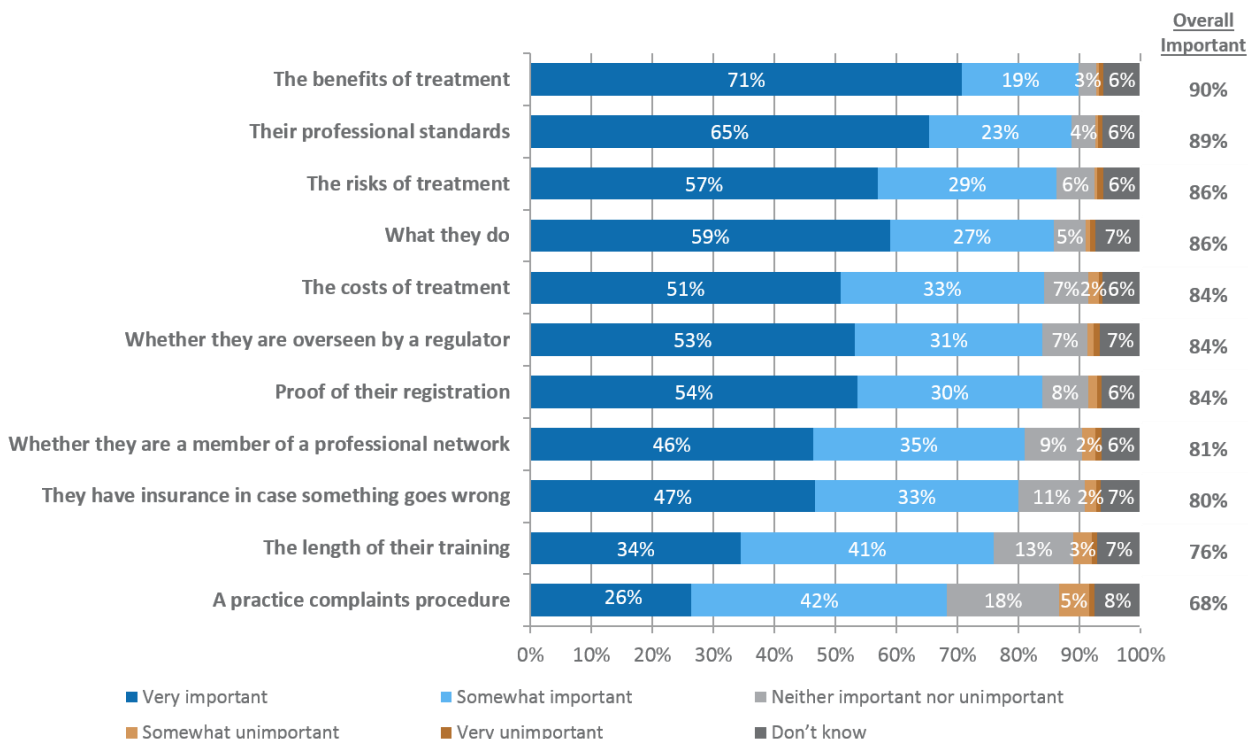
Section 2: Deciding to visit an osteopath: information needs

The second section of this report looks at how the UK public and osteopathic patients prioritise the importance of various types of information when deciding to visit an osteopath and before their first visit.

9 Important information when deciding to visit an osteopath

9.1.1 UK adults who have never before visited an osteopath place the highest importance on having information about the benefits of treatment when imagining making a decision about whether or not to see an osteopath, with nine-in-ten (90%) stating that this would be important to them. Information about their professionals standards (89%), the risks of treatment (86%), and what they do (86%) is also thought to be highly important.

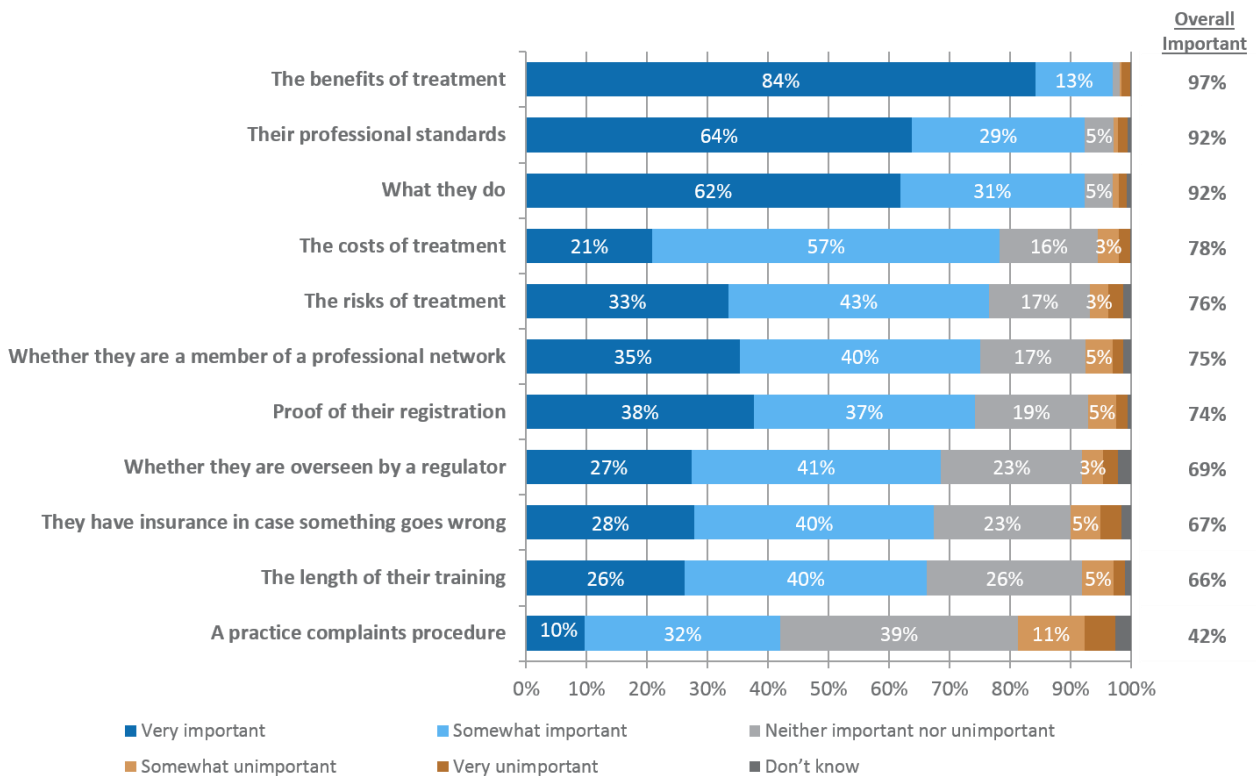
Figure 8: Importance of information on various topics when imagining deciding to visit an osteopath – among those who have never visited



Base: All who have never visited an osteopath (n=1,009)

- 9.1.2 Older adults aged 55+ are particularly likely to report that a variety of types of information would be important to them if deciding whether or not to visit an osteopath, including information on the benefits of treatment (96% compared with 86% on average among those under 55).
- 9.1.3 Members of the UK public who *have* visited an osteopath also prioritise information on the benefits above all else when deciding to have treatment, with 97% stating that this is important. On par with non-patients, these individuals have similar preferences, placing high levels of importance on the osteopath's professional standards (92%) and what they do (92%).
- 9.1.4 However, osteopathic patients are somewhat less likely than non-patients to feel that information about the risks of treatment is important (86% compared with 76%). This could be attributed to them already having more understanding of the associated risks.

Figure 9: Importance of information on various topics when deciding to visit an osteopath – among those who have ever visited



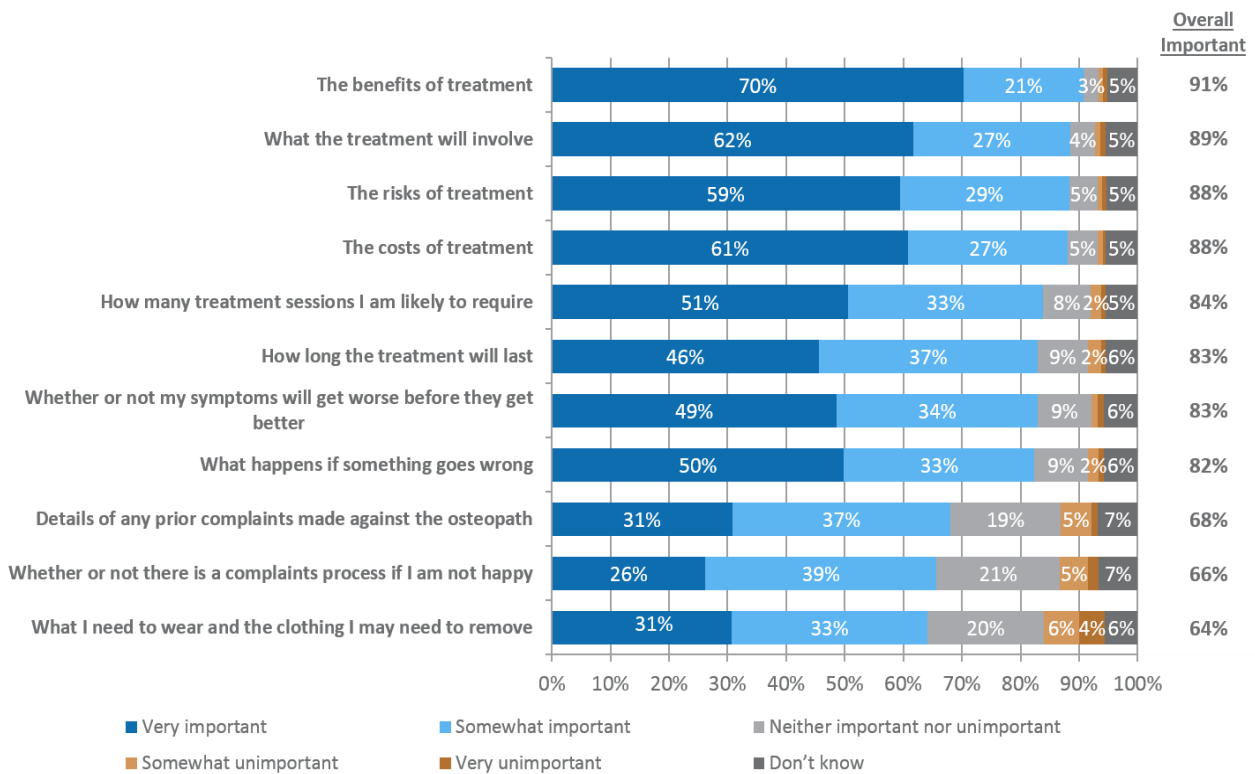
Base: All who have ever visited an osteopath (n=716)

10 Important information before a first visit to an osteopath

10.1.1 Moving on from deciding to visit an osteopath to actually making a visit, information about the benefits of osteopathic treatment continues to be identified as highly significant, with nine in ten (91%) UK adults stating that this would be important to them in advance of their first visit to an osteopath.

10.1.2 While information about clothing requirements, complaints processes, and details of prior complaints are relatively less significant, they are still felt to be important by roughly two-thirds of the UK public (64%, 66% and 68% respectively).

Figure 10: Importance of information on various factors in advance of first visit with an osteopath – UK public



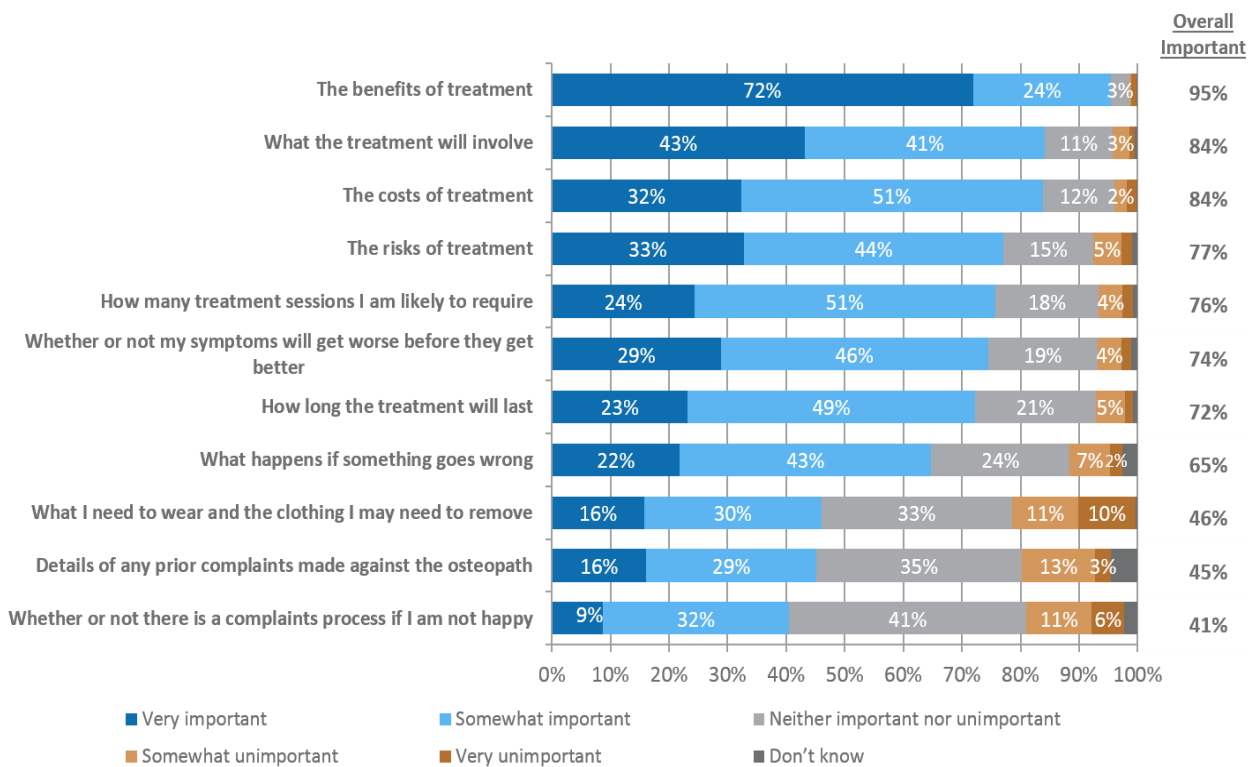
Base: All UK adults (n=1,043)

10.1.3 Consistent with findings regarding the information desired when deciding to visit an osteopath, older adults aged 55+ are more likely than younger adults to feel that this information would be important to them in advance of their first visit.

10.1.4 Most osteopathic patients agree that it is important to them to have information about the benefits of treatment in advance of their first visit, with 95% reporting this. The vast majority also indicate that information on what the treatment will involve (84%) and the costs (84%) is important.

10.1.5 Less than half of osteopathic patients state that information about clothing requirements, details of prior complaints, and whether or not there is a complaints process would be important to them (46%, 45% and 41% respectively).

Figure 11: Importance of information on various factors in advance of first visit with an osteopath – Osteopathic patients



Base: All osteopathic patients (n=523)

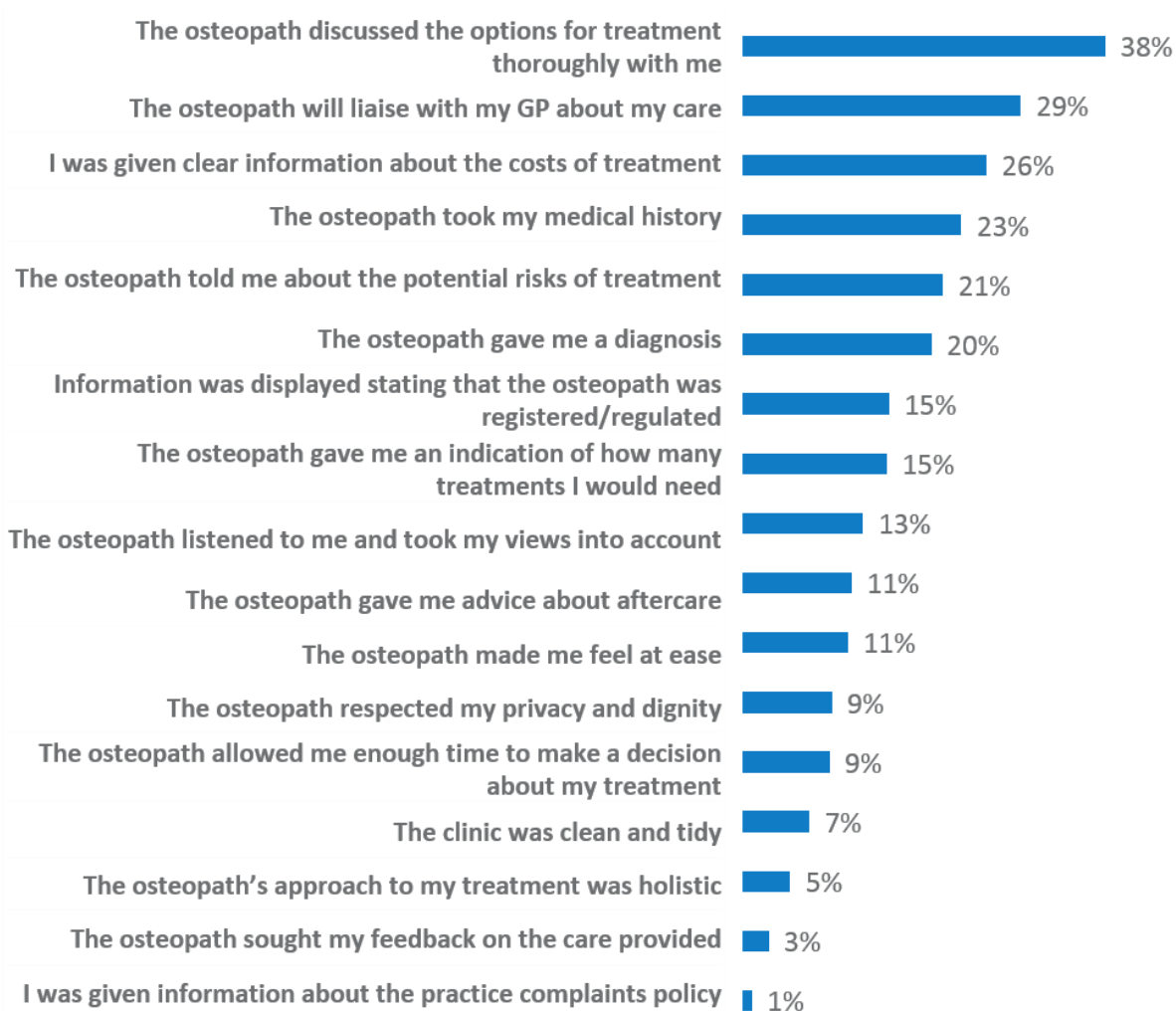
Section 3: Experience of visiting an osteopath

The third section of this report focuses on public perceptions of a positive experience with osteopathy. Results are reported separately for osteopathic patients, who have based their responses on their own recent experiences.

11 Involvement

- 11.1.1 When asked to imagine they have scheduled an appointment with an osteopath, the UK public are most likely to feel that having the osteopath discuss the options for treatment thoroughly with them would be important in giving them a positive experience. Two-in-five people (38%) mention this factor.
- 11.1.2 A relatively significant proportion of the public also feel that having the osteopath liaise with their GP (29%) and being given clear information about the costs of treatment (26%) would be highly important to them in providing a positive experience of osteopathy.
- 11.1.3 Findings indicate that giving the public information about how they will be involved in their diagnosis and treatment would provide significant value in painting a positive picture of osteopathy. The specifics of policies and approach are relatively less important.

Figure 12: Perceptions of a positive experience visiting an osteopath – UK public



Base: All UK adults who have not visited an osteopath in the past 12 months (n=1,025)

11.1.4 Older adults aged 55+ demonstrate that they are particularly likely to perceive a positive experience of osteopathy to be linked with thoroughness from a medical standpoint. They are significantly more likely than younger adults to feel that having the osteopath take their medical history (34% compared with 17% on average among those under 55) and liaise with their GP about their care (36% compared with 25% on average among those under 55) would be highly important in giving them a positive experience.

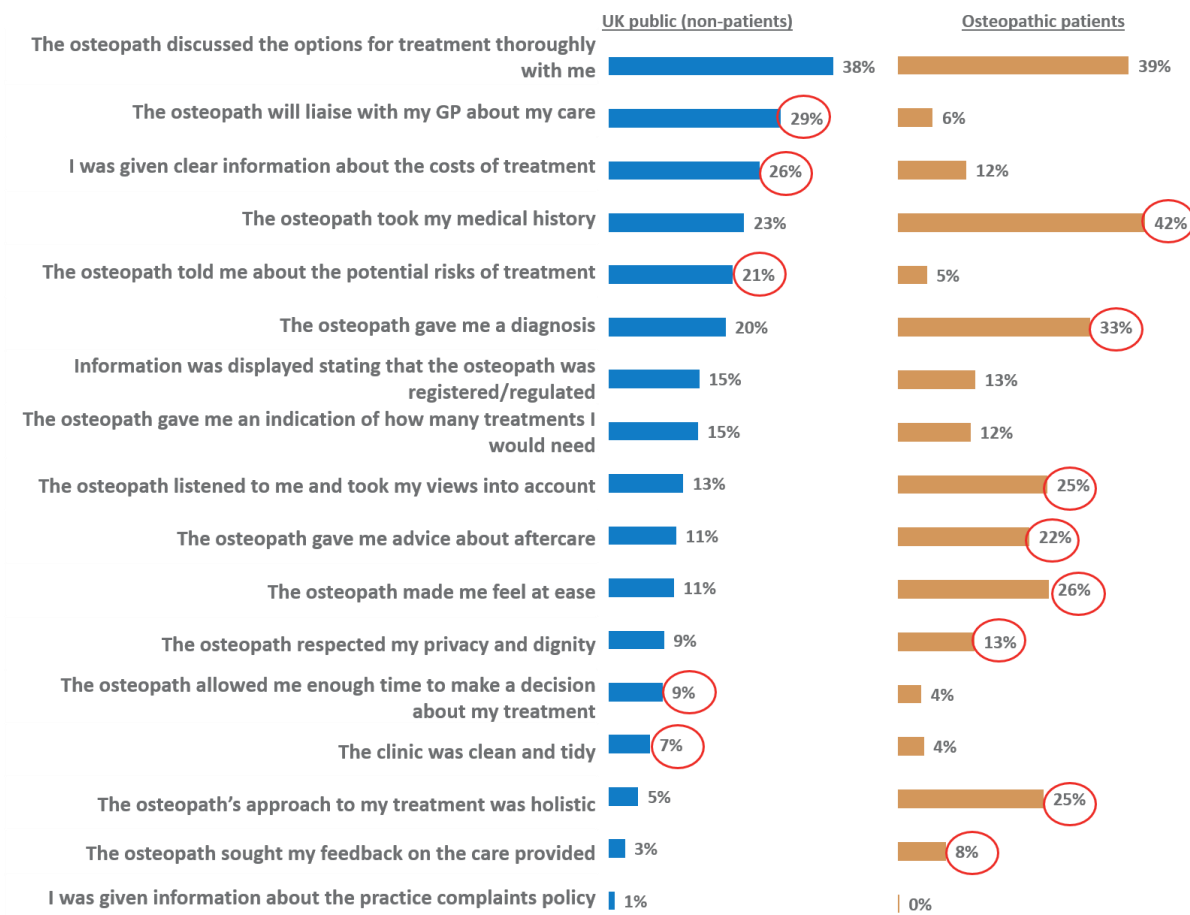
- 11.1.5 The perceptions of a positive experience of osteopathy differ considerably between the general public and those that have visited an osteopath recently. After the public become osteopathic patients, they become much less likely to value liaison between their osteopath and their GP (6% compared with 29%), and less concerned with information about the costs and risks of treatment (12% compared with 26%; 5% compared with 21%). Instead, it becomes much more important to patients than the public that the osteopath takes their medical history and gives them a diagnosis (42% compared with 23%; 33% compared with 20%).
- 11.1.6 In describing a positive experience of osteopathy, patients also demonstrate an increased likelihood to value the osteopath making them feel at ease (26% compared with 11%), taking their views into account (25% compared with 13%), and advising about aftercare (22% compared with 11%). Further, a holistic approach to treatment is felt to be particularly important to patients (25% compared with 5%).

Figure 13: Perceptions of a positive experience visiting an osteopath – Osteopathic patients



Base: All osteopathic patients (n=523)

Figure 14: Perceptions of a positive experience visiting an osteopath – UK public versus osteopathic patients



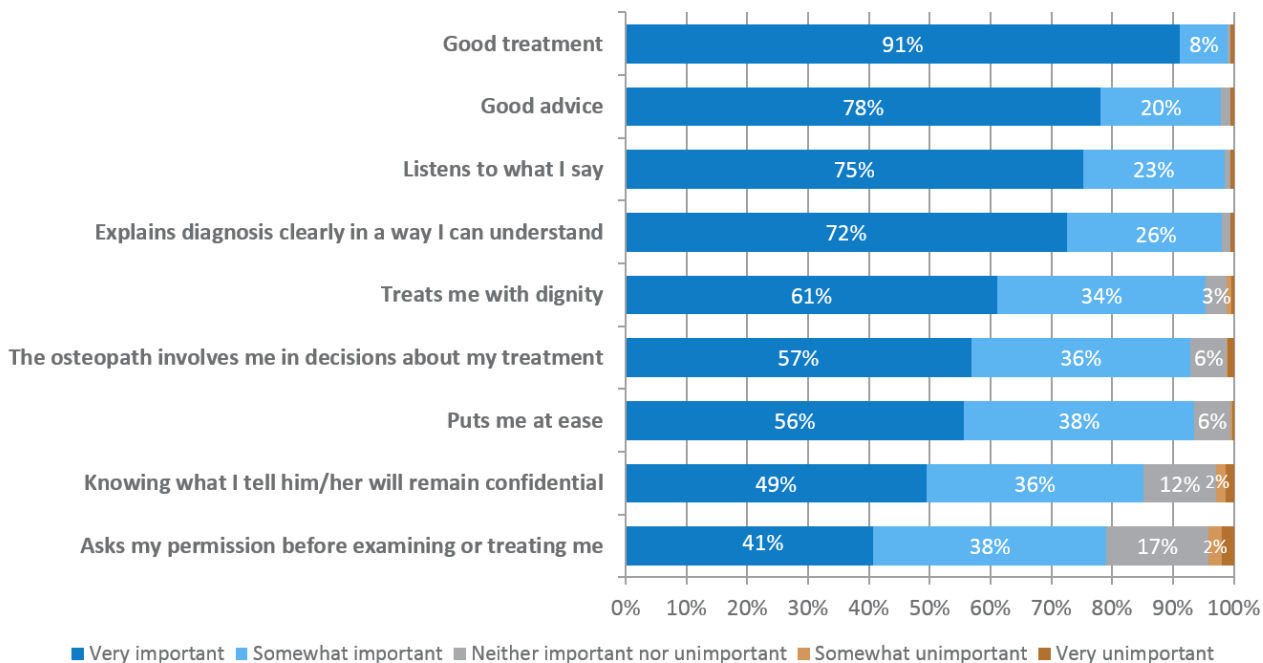
Base: All UK adults who have not visited an osteopath in the past 12 months (n=1,025); All osteopathic patients (n=523)

12 Patients' confidence in an osteopath

12.1.1 Above all else, nine-in-ten patients (91%) feel that good treatment is an important factor in affecting the confidence they have in an osteopath. A strong majority also feel that good advice, listening to what the patient says, and clear explanations of diagnoses are important factors in instilling confidence (78%, 75% and 72% respectively).

12.1.2 While no factors are *unimportant* to patients, there is relatively less importance placed on confidentiality and etiquette in the context of overall confidence.

Figure 15: Important factors in giving confidence in an osteopath – Osteopathic patients



Base: All osteopathic patients (n=523)

12.1.3 Female patients are significantly more likely than male patients to rate each of these factors as *very important* to them, including good treatment (93% compared with 87%), good advice (81% compared with 73%), and listening to what they say (82% compared with 65%).

Section 4: Providing feedback and reporting concerns

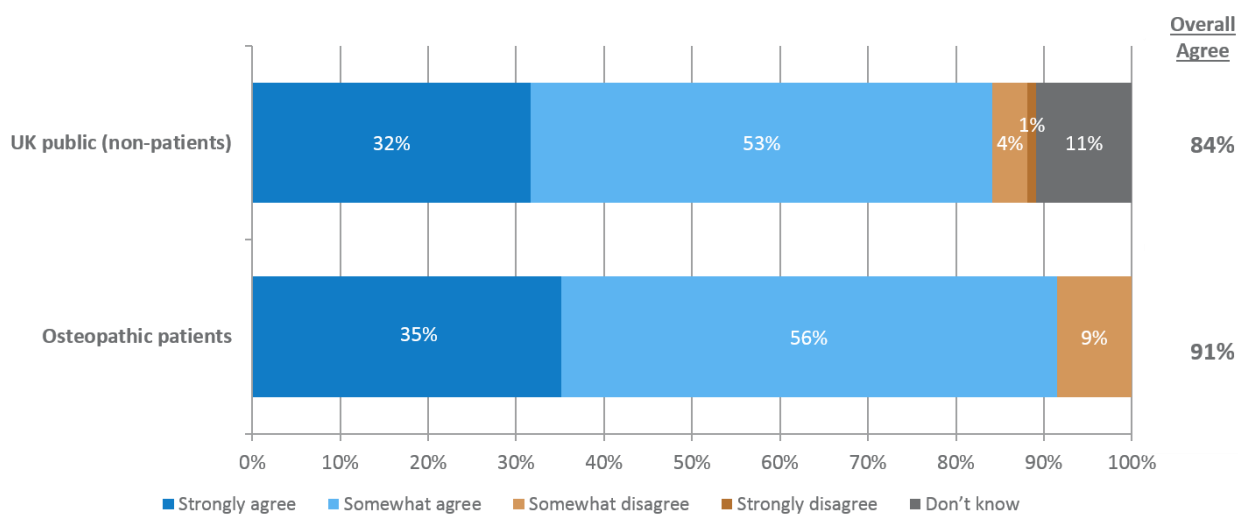
This section of the report looks at perceptions of the importance of providing feedback to osteopaths as well as method of preference and potential barriers to making a complaint.

13 Providing feedback to an osteopath

13.1.1 Osteopathic patients almost unanimously agree (91%) that it is important to provide feedback to an osteopath about their experience, with one third (35%) indicating that they strongly agree and the remaining 56% that they somewhat agree. The vast majority of the UK public (84%) are also in agreement, with one third (32%) agreeing strongly and 53% agreeing somewhat.

13.1.2 Among the public, adults aged 55+ (91%) are more likely to agree than younger adults to agree that it is important to provide this feedback.

Figure 16: Perceptions of importance of providing feedback to an osteopath



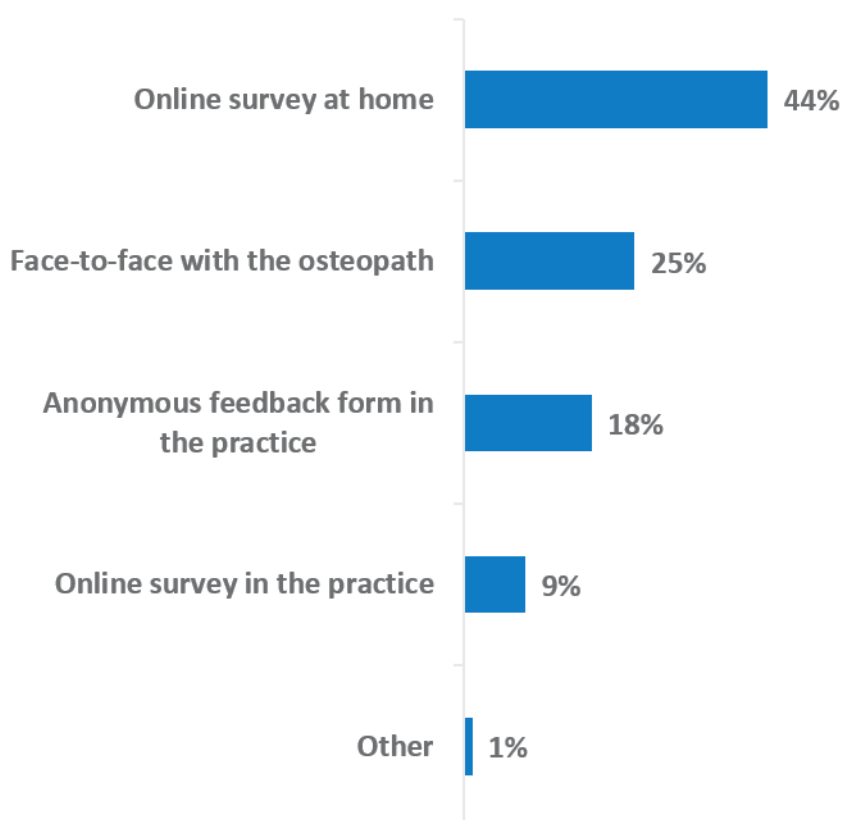
Base: All UK adults who have not visited an osteopath in the past 12 months (n=1,025); All osteopathic patients (n=523)

13.1.3 When asked what methods they would prefer to use to provide this feedback, the public are most likely to prefer an online survey at home (44%). However, one quarter (25%) would most like to provide their feedback more directly and face-to-face with the osteopath. One fifth (18%) prefer an anonymous feedback form in the practice.

13.1.4 We again see differences by age in these preferences, with the older generation (aged 55+) more likely to prefer face-to-face feedback than those aged between 18-24. A third (34%) of those aged over 55 years of age prefer to give feedback in person, whereas just 9% of 18-24s would prefer this and also just 16% of those aged 35-44 would prefer providing feedback face-to-face.

13.1.5 A third (33%) of 18-24 year olds and a quarter (25%) of 25-34 year olds would prefer an anonymous feedback form in the practice compared to just 14% of those aged over 55. This shows the need to provide a variety of feedback mechanisms to ensure that those of differing preferences feel they can provide feedback to an osteopath.

Figure 17: Preferred method for providing feedback – UK public

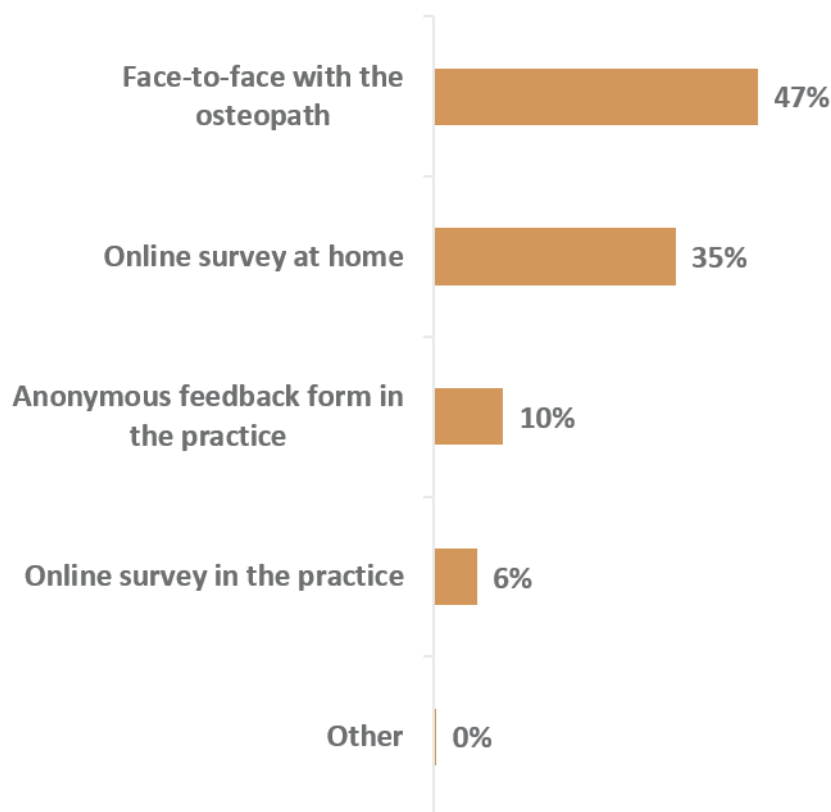


Base: All UK adults who have not visited an osteopath in the past 12 months and agree it is important to provide feedback (n=888)

13.1.6 The survey also asked those who had recently visited an osteopath how they would prefer to provide feedback. Osteopathic patients prefer the idea of giving feedback on their experience face-to-face with the osteopath.

13.1.7 Patients' enhanced preference for providing feedback face-to-face could potentially be a reflection of their established relationship with an osteopath and therefore feeling more comfortable and confident openly discussing their care and treatment.

Figure 18: Preferred method for providing feedback – Patients



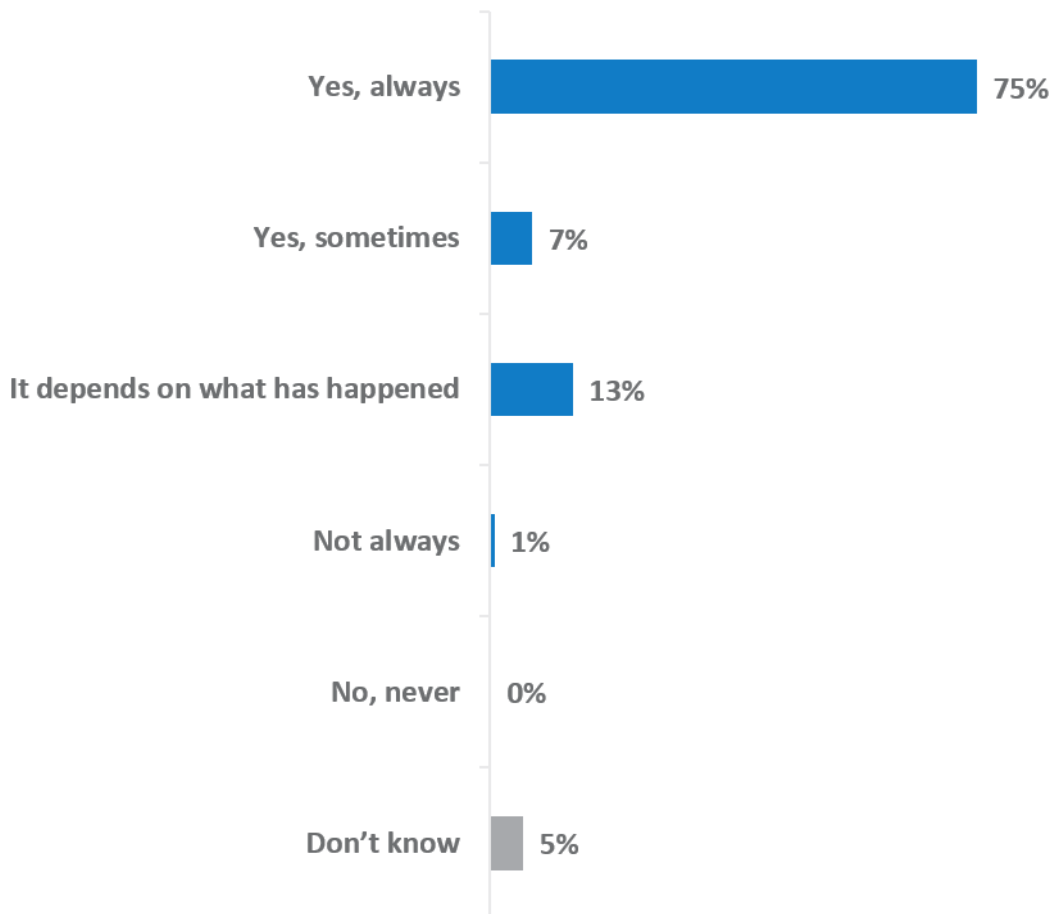
Base: All osteopathic patients who agree it is important to provide feedback (n=488)

14 Being informed of mistakes during care

14.1.1 Three quarters (75%) of the public would always want to be informed if their osteopath made a mistake relating to their care, regardless of the severity of the mistake. The older age groups are most adamant in their desire to be informed of any mistake an osteopath has made, with 83% saying they always want to be informed compared with 72% of those aged (35-44), 65% of those aged 25-34 and 59% of those aged 18-24.

14.1.2 The desire to be informed of any mistake, regardless of severity is the same for those who have recently visited an osteopath, with eight of ten (79%) saying they would always want to be informed of a mistake made during their care.

Figure 19: Willingness to be informed of mistakes during care – UK public



Base: All UK adults (n=1,043)

Section 5: The GOsC and professional standards

This final section of the report examines the sources of information that the UK public and osteopathic patients would use to learn about osteopathy, practice standards, practitioner competence and the regulation of practice.

15 Sources of information for understanding osteopathy

Benefits/risks of osteopathy

15.1.1 As previously identified, having information on the benefits and to a lesser extent the risks of osteopathic treatment is important to the public when they are considering visiting an osteopath. Related to this, the public were asked where they would look or who they would ask if they wanted to find out about the benefits/risks of osteopathy. Results indicate that internet (or online) searches are where the public would turn most commonly to find out information on the benefits/risks of osteopathy. This is clearly the most important channel for ensuring that the public can quickly find accurate information on the benefits/risks of osteopathy.

15.1.2 Where the public referenced sources of information not related to the internet, the most common source mentioned was their GP, followed by an osteopath themselves and then friends who have had experience of osteopathy treatment. With GPs being a common source that the public would turn to for information on the benefits/risks of osteopathy it is important that GPs are well informed and that information is available in local surgeries that provide the public with reliable information on the benefits/risks of osteopathy.

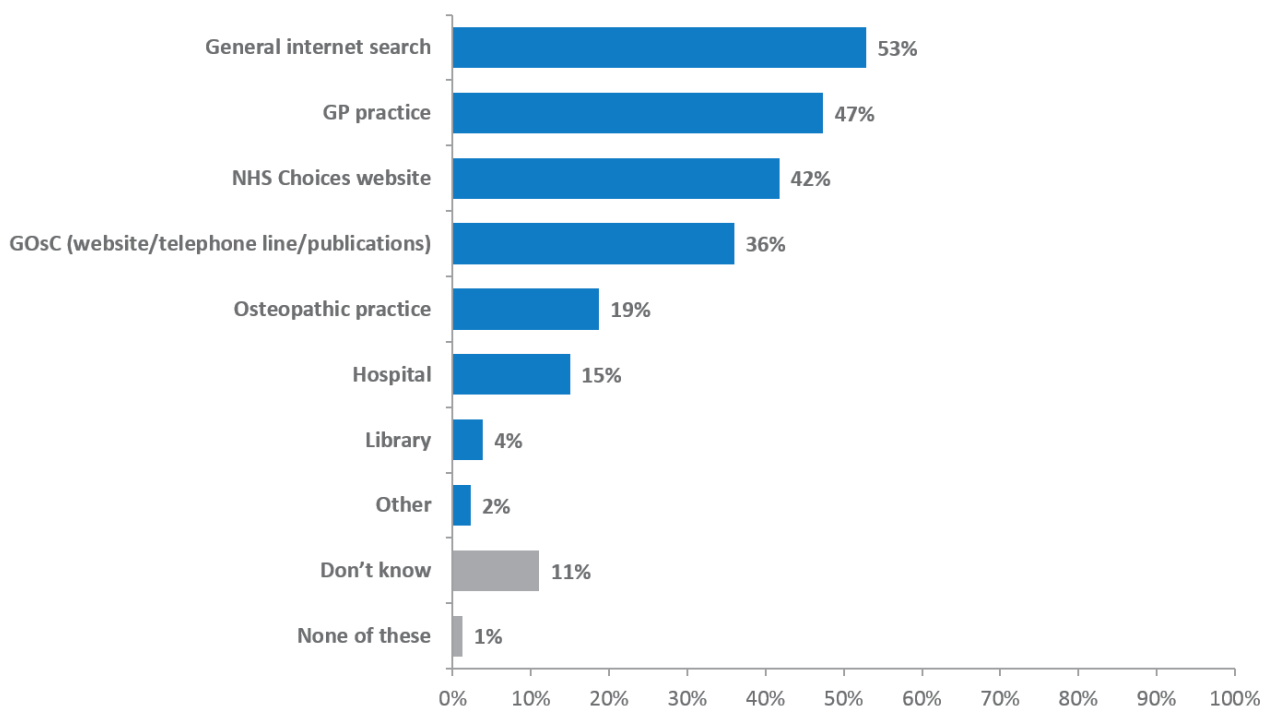
Standards of osteopathic practice

15.1.3 When seeking information on the standards of osteopathic practice, a general internet search and contacting their GP practice are the two most common methods that the public would use to find information on standards of osteopathic practice.

15.1.4 Four out of ten members of the public would use the NHS Choices website and a similar proportion (36%) would contact the GOsC for information on the standards of osteopathic practice. Older people (55+) are statistically significantly more likely to contact the GOsC (46% reporting this) than those aged 18-24 (22%), 25-34 (23%) or 35-44 (32%) – with the likelihood of contacting the GOsC increasing with age.

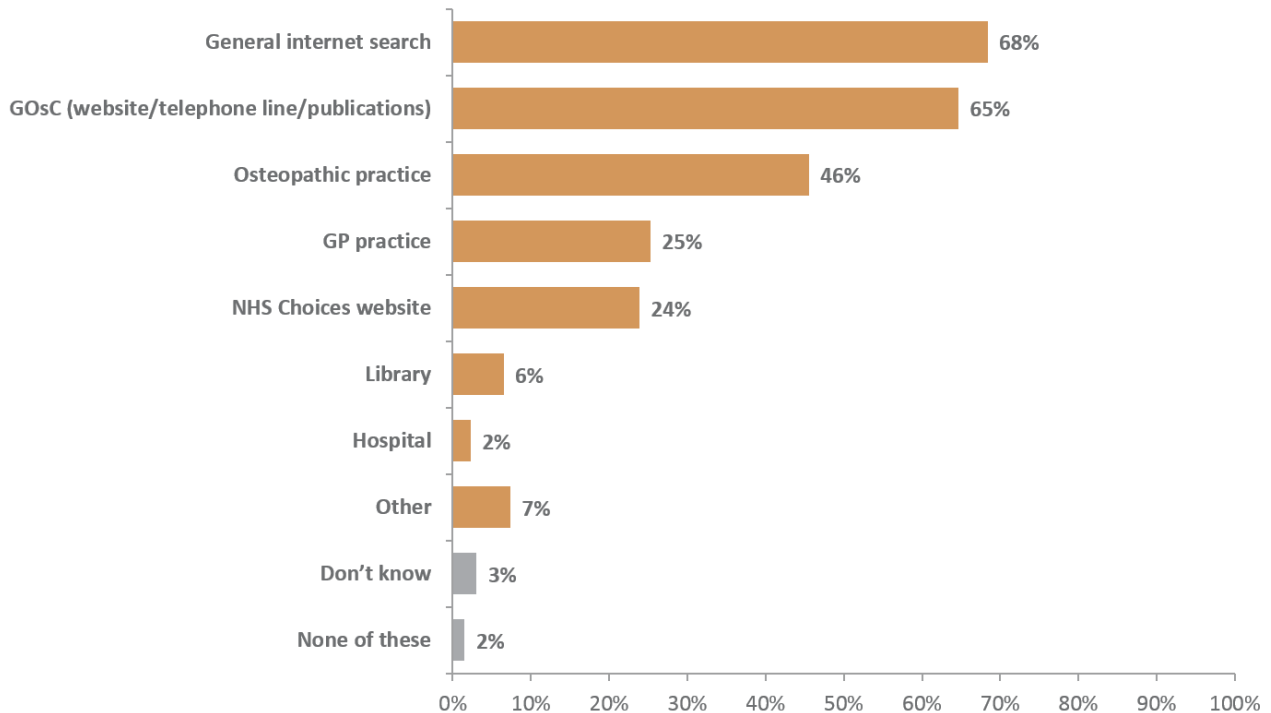
15.1.5 Positively, two thirds (65%) of recent osteopathic patients say they would contact the GOsC for information on standards of practice. This is broadly on par with the proportion of osteopathic patients who say they would use a general internet search. Relatively, osteopathic patients are less likely to report they would use sources such as their GP practice (25% reporting this) and the NHS Choices website (24%).

Figure 20: Sources of information on standards of osteopathic practice – UK public



Base: All UK adults (n=1,043)

Figure 21: Sources of information on standards of osteopathic practice – Osteopathic patients



Base: All osteopathic patients (n=523)

16 Assurance of osteopaths' fitness to practise

16.1.1 Having to undergo inspections by an independent body/regulator is the factor that gives the public most assurance that osteopaths remain up to date and fit to practise, with six out of ten members of the public reporting this.

16.1.2 Publicising that osteopaths do in fact undergo regular inspections would be the most effective way of giving assurance that an osteopath is fit to practise. An osteopath being able to prove that they have undertaken a set number of days of training/development (CPD) including relevant mandatory training is also mentioned by 40% of the public as a factor that gives them assurance that an osteopath is fit to practise.

16.1.3 In comparison, undertaking a set number of training hours on subjects chosen by the osteopaths themselves, is mentioned by just 15%, showing that the public have greater assurance when an independent body is overseeing the training/development of an osteopath.

16.1.4 The older members of the public (those aged 45+) are significantly more likely to report that inspections by an independent body is a factor that gives them assurance that an osteopath is fit to practise – with 67% of those aged 45-54 and 72% of those aged 55+ reporting this compared with 47% of those aged 18-24.

Figure 22: Factors that give assurance that an osteopath is fit to practise – UK public



Base: All UK adults (n=1,043)

16.1.5 Osteopathic patients provide feedback similar to that of the general public; more than half (57%) report that having to undergo inspections by an independent body/regulator is one of the factors that would give them the most assurance that osteopaths remain up to date and fit to practise.

16.1.6 Many patients also state that osteopaths having to prove a set number of hours of relevant mandatory training/development would be one of the factors to give them the most assurance that osteopaths remain up to date and fit to practise. One-in-two (50%) report this perception.

Figure 23: Factors that give assurance that an osteopath is fit to practise – Osteopathic patients



Base: All osteopathic patients (n=523)

17 Awareness of facts about the osteopathic profession

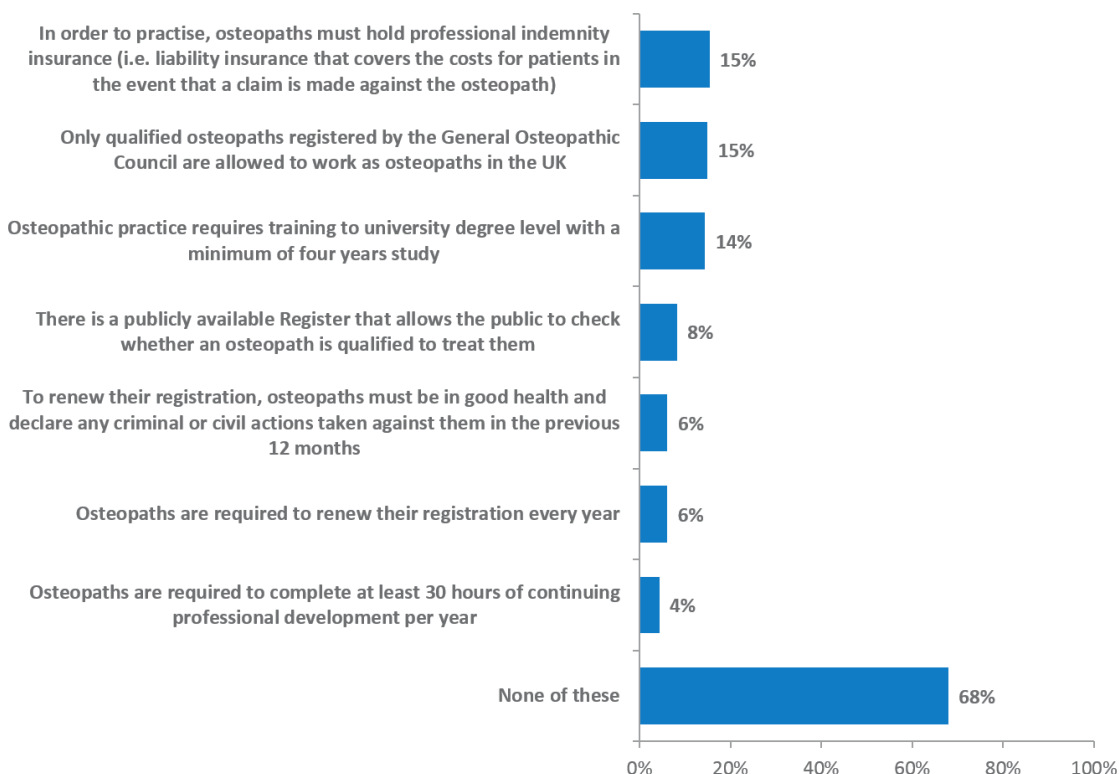
17.1.1 Seven out of ten members of the public (68%) were not aware of any of the seven facts presented to them about the osteopathic profession. This was a broadly consistent picture across demographics within the population.

17.1.2 Of those aware of some of the facts presented to them, 15% report that they were aware that in order to practise, osteopaths must hold professional indemnity insurance and that only qualified osteopaths registered by the General Osteopathic Council are allowed to work as osteopaths in the UK.

17.1.3 A similar proportion of the public (14%) say they were aware that osteopathic practice requires training to university degree level with a minimum of four years study. In contrast a very small minority (4%) were aware that osteopaths are required to complete at least 30 hours of continuing professional development per year.

17.1.4 These findings are important when we consider that public confidence in health professionals is closely related to the fact that they provide good quality care, have a recognised level of training and are inspected by an independent body – raising awareness of the facts related to these factors may have a positive impact on perceptions of the osteopathic profession.

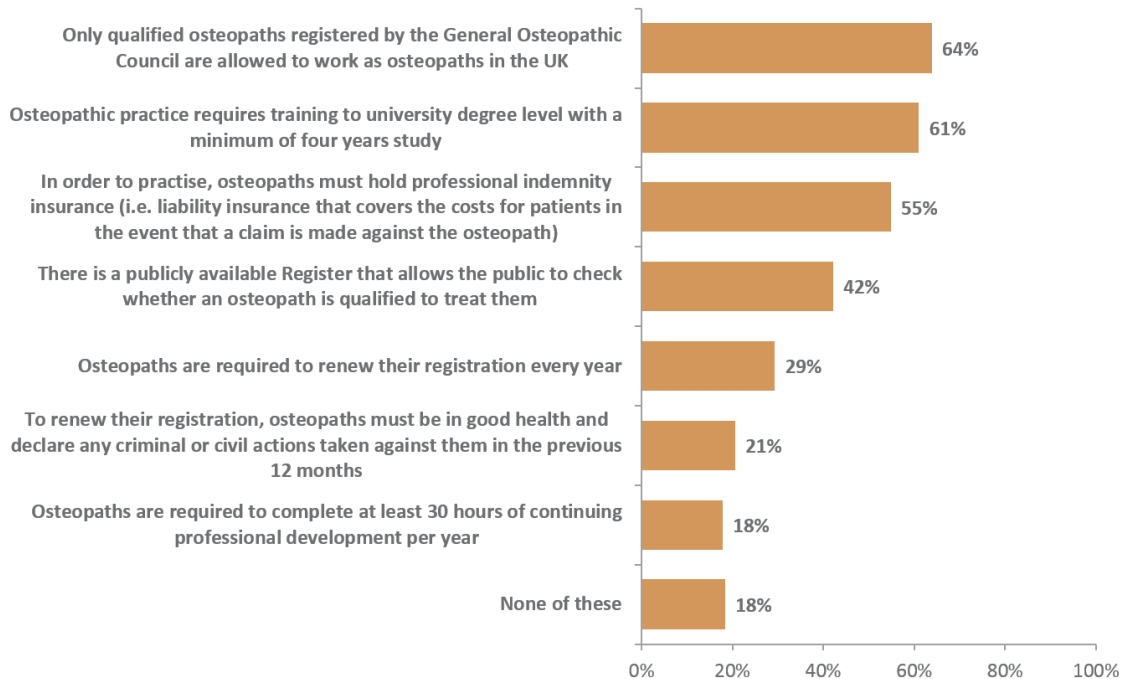
Figure 24: Awareness of the facts of the osteopathic profession – UK public



Base: All UK adults (n=1,043)

- 17.1.5 The awareness of facts about the osteopathic profession is much higher amongst those people who have recently visited an osteopath, as may be expected. Just one fifth (18%) of osteopathic patients were not aware of any of the seven facts.
- 17.1.6 Awareness is highest regarding the fact that only qualified osteopaths registered by the General Osteopathic Council are allowed to work as osteopaths in the UK (64% aware) and that osteopathic practice now requires training to university degree level with a minimum of four years study (61% aware).
- 17.1.7 Importantly, however, these findings also indicate that more than one third (36%) of osteopathic patients are *not* aware that only registered osteopaths are allowed to work in the UK, and more than half (58%) are not aware that there is a publicly available online register where they can check that their osteopath is registered.
- 17.1.8 Awareness is much lower amongst osteopathic patients that to renew their registration, osteopaths must be in good health and declare any criminal or civil actions taken against them in the previous 12 months, with a fifth (21%) aware of this. Awareness is also low that osteopaths are required to complete at least 30 hours of continuing professional development per year (18% aware).

Figure 25: Awareness of the facts of the osteopathic profession – Osteopathic patients



Base: All osteopathic patients (n=523)

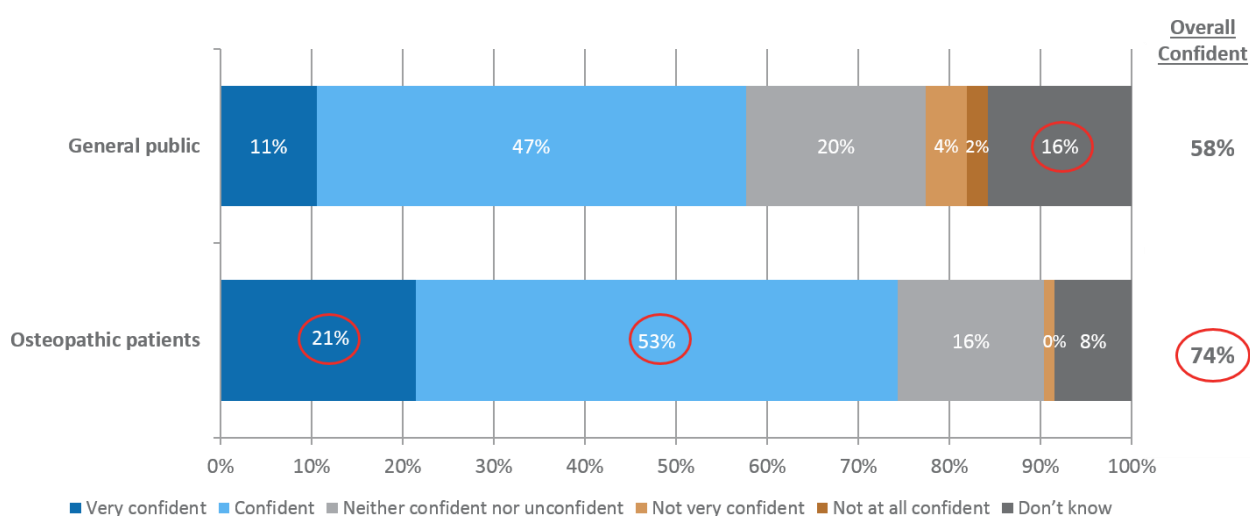
18 Complaints and the General Osteopathic Council

18.1.1 The majority of the public have confidence that if they raised a concern about an osteopath with the GOsC, it would be properly investigated and addressed, with six out of ten (58%) confident this would happen. Women (63%) are more likely than men (52%). In addition some geographic differences occur in the confidence of the public, with confidence higher in the north of England (63%) and the Midlands (65%) than for those living in London (49%) and Scotland (50%).

18.1.2 As figure 25 shows, osteopathic patients are highly confident overall that if they raised concerns about an osteopath with the GOsC, this would be properly investigated and addressed, with three quarters (74%) reporting they would be confident.

18.1.3 The general public are more likely than osteopathic patients to indicate that they do not know whether concerns would be properly investigated and addressed, which is likely in part a reflection of the lower levels of awareness of osteopathy in the general population. It could also be an indication that osteopathic patients are being exposed to information about the GOsC and therefore have more confidence.

Figure 26: Confidence that the osteopathic profession’s regulator would properly investigate and address concerns raised about an osteopath



Base: All UK adults (n=1,043); All osteopathic patients (n=523)

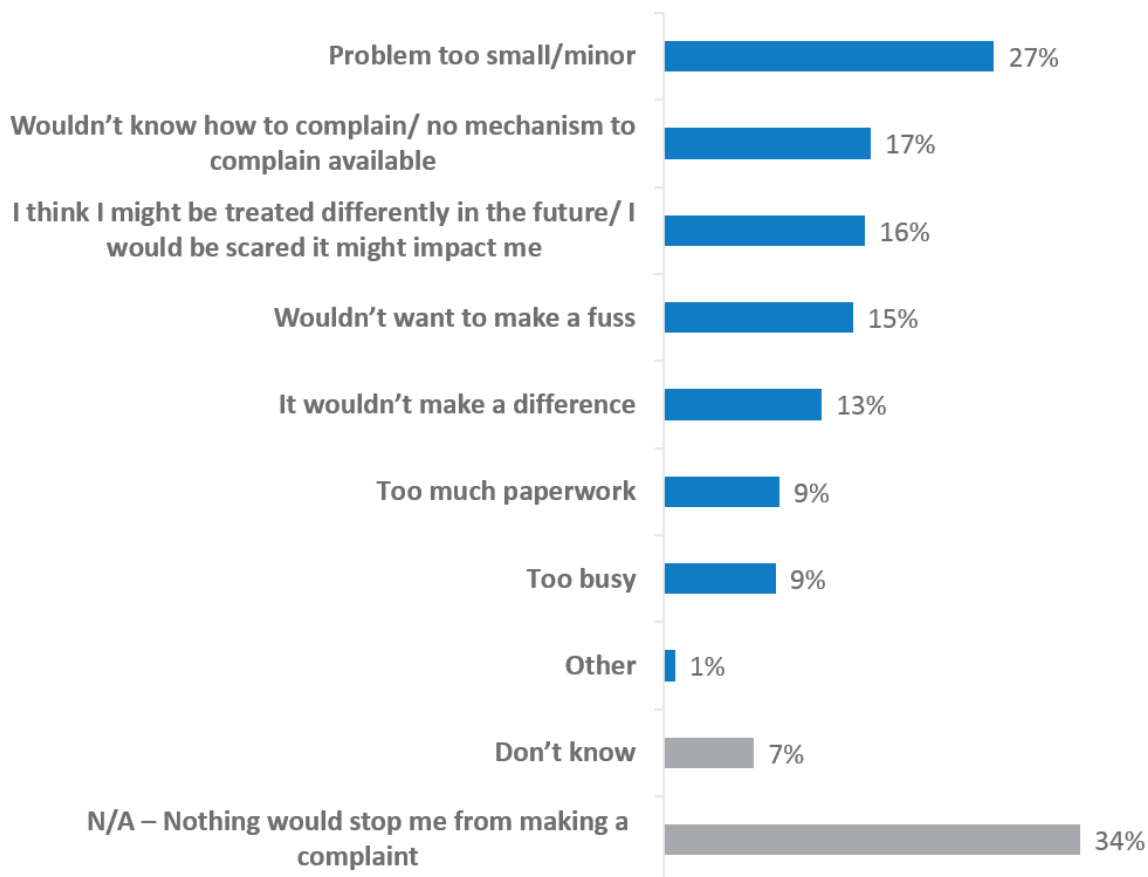
19 Barriers to making a complaint

19.1.1 Respondents were asked to think about action they would take if they were dissatisfied with the quality of care they received and what, if anything, would stop them from making a complaint. The most mentioned reason for not complaining was the feeling that the problem is too small/minor to warrant making a complaint, with 27% of the public mentioning this.

19.1.2 Importantly, a fifth (17%) of the public say they would not make a complaint because they would not know who to complain to or that there is no mechanism available. A similar proportion of the public (16%) fear that they may be treated differently by the osteopath if they raised a concern or that they wouldn’t want to make a fuss (15%).

19.1.3 However, the public most often state that nothing would stop them from complaining if they were dissatisfied with their osteopathic care (34%).

Figure 27: Potential barriers to making a complaint – UK public



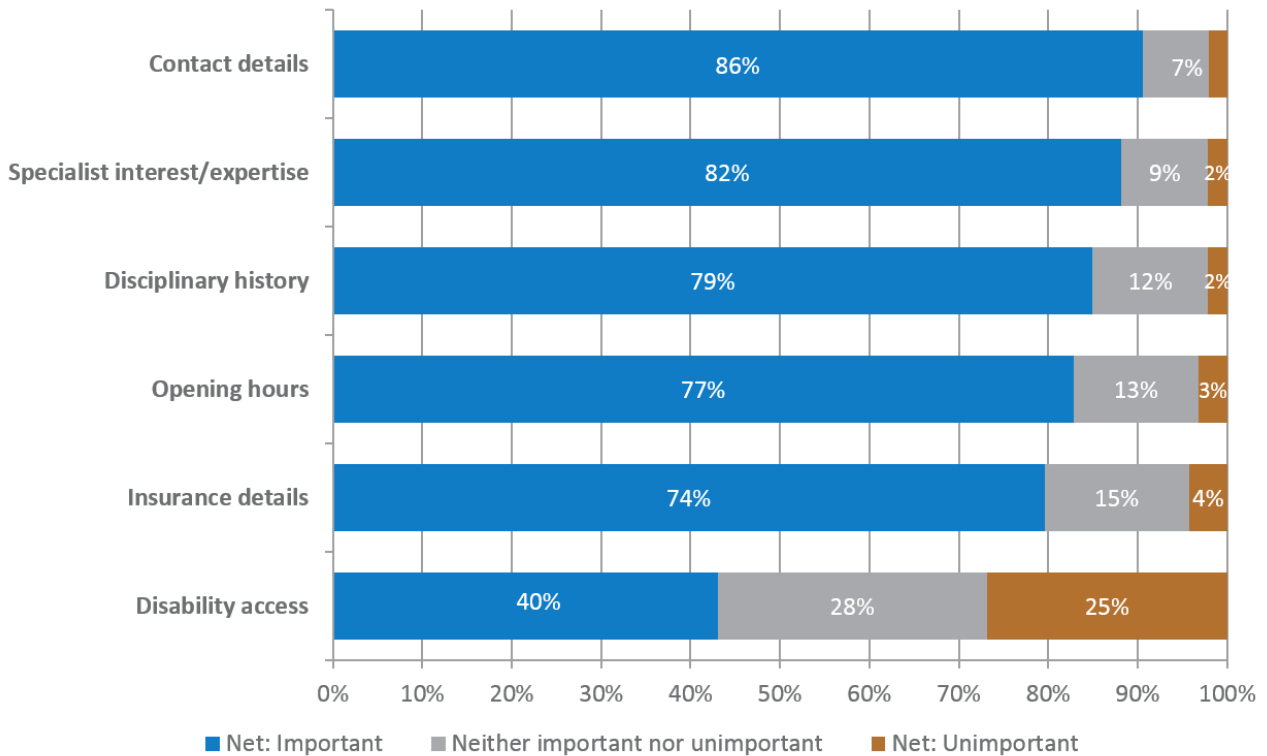
Base: All UK adults (n=1,043)

20 The public Register

20.1.1.1 With regard to a public register of osteopaths as a source of public information about osteopaths and their osteopathic practice, contact details are considered important by 86% of the public. A further eight out of ten members of the public (82%) feel that it is important that a public register includes information about the osteopath's specialist interest/expertise. Significant proportions also feel that disciplinary history (79%) and opening hours (77%) would be important information.

20.1.2 Four out of ten members of the public (40%) believe that it is important that a public register contains details of disability access. Holding this view would be heavily correlated with any personal experience of disability.

Figure 28: Information that it is important to be on a public register – UK public



Base: All UK adults (n=1,043)

Conclusions

- 20.1.3 This report presents the findings from a survey of over 1,000 members of the UK public and over 500 people who have visited an osteopath in the past 12 months. These sample sizes give a robust assessment of public and patient perceptions and experience of the osteopathic profession. In support of findings from the GOsC's qualitative research, a strong relationship has been identified between public confidence and healthcare regulation. Levels of confidence in health professionals closely mirror perceptions of regulation.
- 20.1.4 Further, nearly half of the UK public report that a private health professional being monitored by a regulatory body is an important factor in establishing trust. These findings support conclusions arising from the qualitative research and indicate that raising awareness of regulation is an important factor in driving up levels of confidence and trust that the public have in an osteopath or health professionals more widely.
- 20.1.5 Qualitative research indicated that there was a general assumption that osteopathy is a regulated profession, but little knowledge of what this regulation involves, how stringent it is or if a register of osteopaths exists. In fact, less than half (43%) of UK adults indicate that they think osteopaths are regulated and just 8% of the UK public are aware of the existence of the publically available register of osteopaths.
- 20.1.6 While awareness of various facts relating to the regulation of the osteopathic profession is considerably higher among recent patients than the general public, there is room for improvement in terms of educating patients. More than one-third of osteopathic patients are not aware osteopaths must be registered to practise in the UK, and more than half are not aware that there is a publicly available online register where this can be checked. Consistent with the GOsC's qualitative research findings, public awareness of the Register of osteopaths was very limited overall.
- 20.1.7 When the public consider information of importance to them on a public register of osteopaths, the provision of contact details is considered most important. However, several other pieces of information are also thought to be important, including disciplinary history and specialist interest and expertise.

- 20.1.8 Members of the public who have never before visited an osteopath imagine that when making a decision about doing so, information about the benefits of treatment and the osteopath's professional standards would be most important to them. Information about what an osteopath does and the risks of treatment is also felt to be highly important. These elements are prioritised ahead of information such as the osteopath's insurance, training and practice complaints procedure. People who have never visited an osteopath place the most value on information about how the treatment will help, what the osteopath will do and generally what their professional standards are. This is consistent with results from the GOsC's qualitative research, through which it was found that in the early stages of the patient journey, key pieces of information should focus on the risks and costs of treatment, and what will happen at the visit.
- 20.1.9 As evidenced in the GOsC's qualitative research, when visiting an osteopath the public would value clear communication, a thorough initial assessment, and being involved in treatment decisions. Quantitative findings reveal, however, that perceptions of a positive experience of osteopathy evolve considerably when the public become osteopathic patients. While the general public are likely to imagine that a good experience would involve their osteopath liaising with their GP and being given information about the costs and risks of treatment, the focus shifts significantly among recent patients, who prioritise actions such as the osteopath taking their medical history, giving them a diagnosis and taking their views into account. It appears that in some ways these recent patients have adapted their expectations based on actual experience.
- 20.1.10 UK adults who have visited an osteopath in the past 12 months would most prefer to provide feedback to an osteopath face-to-face. This differs considerably from the general public, who would primarily prefer to provide feedback at home through an online survey, which indicates that patients' inclination to provide feedback face-to-face could be a reflection of them already having a relationship with their osteopath and therefore feeling more comfortable and confident openly discussing the quality of their treatment.

20.1.11 This research has presented a summary of public perceptions of the osteopathic profession. While some differences have been found in the perceptions of the public by demographics and location, in the main what we find is a consistent view of the osteopathic profession. The findings in this report stand alongside the GOsC's qualitative research on public expectations of osteopathy and should be considered in conjunction with this previous research.