



Policy and Education Committee

9 March 2022

Boundaries communication plan and activities

Classification	Public
Purpose	For discussion
Issue	To update the Committee on our communication plan, work undertaken and planned, and success measures in relation to boundaries related issues.
Recommendations	To consider the content of the paper.
Financial and resourcing implications	Costs of activities undertaken and planned will be from planned budgets.
Equality and diversity implications	EDI issues impact on communications strategies and accessibility of resources and events. Further implications relate to patient and practitioner characteristics in boundaries cases, which are not explored in this paper.
Communications implications	Communication activities in relation to boundaries are included in the paper.
Annex	None.
Author	Steven Bettles, Liz Niman

Key messages

- This paper outlines our boundaries communication project plan, with an overview of activities undertaken and planned, to raise awareness of and support professional practice and decision making in this area. We seek feedback from the committee on this.
- The latest NCOR analysis of concerns and complaints data indicates an increase in boundaries issues.
- We have a boundaries communications project plan which has the aims including the raising awareness, helping osteopaths and education institutions understand the issues and to help demonstrate the need for the use of professional judgement.
- We have undertaken a range of activities in 2021 (case scenarios, video and blog) and will continue with activities throughout of 2022.
- We have set out in the paper a number of possible success factors - see para 9.

Background

1. As was reported to the Committee in [October 2021](#), the latest NCOR analysis of concerns and complaints data indicates an increase in boundaries issues arising:

'Persisting areas of complaints were those relating to 'sexual impropriety' (7 year mean 12, 2020 =14,) and 'conducting a personal relationship with a patient' (7 year mean 4, 2020 = 5,).

When the concerns and complaints are mapped against the Osteopathic Practice Standards (OPS) we can see that 'Professionalism' remains the area of most concerns'.

2. In this paper, we seek feedback from the Committee on the boundaries communication plan and activities developed to address this issue.

Discussion

Boundaries Communications Project

3. We have been implementing a broader boundaries communications project for some months, with a variety of activities and resources. Here we provide more detail in relation to this strand of activity.
4. The aims underpinning the project are:
 - To raise awareness of boundaries as an issue and to ensure osteopaths understand that many situations are not necessarily as simple as they may seem.

- For osteopaths to understand the impact these issues can potentially have on patients and the harm they can cause to patients.
- For osteopaths to understand that they need to exercise their professional judgement and to seek advice and/or the views of colleagues and peers where this would be helpful. We also want to ensure awareness of the changing societal context.
- To reduce the numbers and proportion of concerns and complaints in this area (but we are aware that this might take time to come about).
- To raise awareness and understanding of the issues with the education providers so they can help students and future osteopaths handle these situations appropriately (at whichever end of the concern they may be). Educators also make up a significant section of the profession in their own right so encouraging understanding in this group will be beneficial in itself.
- To ensure that patients understand what to expect and know what not to expect and how to raise a concern if things go wrong

5. Activities undertaken so far have included:

- From July 2021: [Case scenarios](#): Monthly boundaries 'teasers' which share a new tricky scenario and the following month thoughts/reflections with the aim of helping support osteopaths in the application of the OPS in practice. The response to a poll run in the September ebulletin to date suggests an 80:20 positive/negative split regarding whether readers were finding these useful.
- 21 July 2021 Video: What does the latest NCOR report say about concerns and complaints? Professor Dawn Carnes, Director of the National Council for Osteopathic Research, talks through some of the key findings from the latest report from NCOR on concerns and complaints raised about osteopaths and osteopathic services, between 2013 and 2019.
- 10 August 2021 [blog on NCOR report](#): What causes concerns? Reflections on the latest NCOR concerns and complaints report. Fiona Browne explores what we can learn from the latest sector-wide report from the National Council for Osteopathic Research (NCOR), prepared by Professor Dawn Carnes. The report collates anonymised data on the types of concerns received by the insurers, the Institute of Osteopathy (the professional membership body), and also the GOSc.
- 2 Sept 2021 First new 'Insights on Fitness to Practise' ebulletin designed to help demystify our fitness to practise processes. The ebulletin looked at a recent case considered by the Professional Conduct Committee relating to an allegation of breaching professional boundaries.

- Student presentations: We have delivered presentations to first year students at all education providers (except one which is planned). These are designed to introduce regulation, professionalism and the Osteopathic Practice Standards, with boundaries scenarios are incorporated even at this early stage to illustrate professionalism and standards in practice.

Research undertaken by Julie Stone

6. In 2017, GOsC commissioned an independent consultant, Julie Stone to undertake a [thematic analysis](#) of boundaries education and training within the UK's osteopathic education institutions. We were keen to understand how things had progressed in relation to boundaries training and the broader professional context since the 2017 report, and commissioned Julie Stone to undertake a further review in 2021.
7. The research report '*Supporting professionals, protecting patients: shifting the narrative on professional boundaries in osteopathy*', will be reported to the Committee at its private meeting on 17 March 2022.

Future plans

8. Further activities/resources planned over the next few months include:
 - Guest blogs on boundaries issues – for example, from an OEI lead discussing the delivery of boundaries teaching and ethical practice in osteopathic education programmes.
 - We are exploring the feasibility of producing resources in alternative formats to aid impact and engagement (for example, podcast style recording or Facebook live event).
 - An exploratory workshop with osteopaths to review the issues and work undertaken so far, and to see what further might help them navigate these in practice.
 - Dissemination of Julie Stone's research when published. We will undertake specific meetings with the osteopathic education providers and with our patient group. We are considering, also, a multi-stakeholder dissemination event to maximise impact. The research report will be publicised to all osteopaths via our ebulletin.
 - Once it has been considered by the Committee, to reflect further on the recommendations in Julie Stone's report, from a communications perspective particularly in relation to the practice standards and guidance, and consider how these might be effectively acted upon.

- We have offered OEIs specific sessions with students in addition to our Year 1 presentations. These will provide an opportunity to revisit boundaries issues and communication/consent standards at a later stage in their training.
- Running sessions at the Institute of Osteopathy's forthcoming series of roadshows and convention with a focus on professional judgement and decision making, to include boundaries work.

Success measures

9. We will be looking at a range of factors to gauge the success and impact of work undertaken, for example:
 - Ultimately a reduction in concerns and complaints and the proportion in this area (Equally, increased engagement and perhaps counterintuitively increased numbers of queries in this area might also demonstrate progress towards this desired outcome in terms of raised awareness).
 - Reduction in numbers of those patients who raise concerns that don't proceed to cases.
 - Potentially, numbers and types of queries from osteopaths in this area, though these are generally low with none having been received by the Professional Standards Team over the last year. Osteopaths may feel uncomfortable raising these queries with the regulator.
 - Achieved intended level of activity around the topic – meet outcomes in terms of activities/resource development.
 - Proxy awareness measures e.g. ebulletin and blog stats, webinar attendance etc., when this topic is discussed.
 - Increased presence in education providers for Y1 presentations and other later year groups where there can be a greater focus on this topic.
 - Focus group outcomes.
 - Growing sense of empowerment among students that they would know what to do in a difficult situation with a patient, fellow student, tutor (via feedback on boundaries sessions).
 - Growing sense of knowledge/empowerment to raise an issue if become aware of a colleague or peer behaving inappropriately (via feedback from group sessions).
 - Qualitative and anecdotal insight showing growing awareness/acceptance of what is/not appropriate (we know that some have been using the boundaries

scenarios to facilitate their own case discussions on boundaries issues and it would be helpful to tap into the outcomes of this where possible).

10. We are keen to seek feedback from the Committee in regard to the activities undertaken and planned in relation to the boundaries communications project, and the suggested evaluation/success measures.

Recommendations:

To consider the content of the paper.