

GOsC Communications and Engagement Strategy 2013-16

Introduction

The General Osteopathic Council has a statutory duty to develop and regulate the profession of osteopathy in the UK to ensure public protection and high standards of practice. To fulfil this duty successfully, we must engage closely, listen and build partnerships with patients, the public, the osteopathic profession, and other relevant interest groups. Two-way dialogue is essential to effective communication and engagement.

It is necessary that the public is aware of our role and has confidence in the standards we promote, and that registrants embrace regulation, understand what is required of them as health professionals and recognise the benefits for all of regulated practice.

This document sets out a framework for communications and engagement activity to support the delivery of the GOsC Corporate Plan 2013-16. Its six high level strategic objectives, with associated goals and processes for evaluating progress over time, are underpinned at the operational level by a communications action plan.

The strategy is informed by feedback gathered from our stakeholders and evidence arising from recent GOsC research, taking cognisance also of changing societal expectations and external regulatory influences.

It recognises a drive within the osteopathic profession to develop osteopathic practice in the four countries of the UK and the role of the GOsC working with our partners to assist this process in the interests of promoting the safety and quality of osteopathic care.

Evidence informing this strategy

In addressing the needs and preferences of all our stakeholders, this strategy draws on a number of strands of evidence, including:

- The 2012 GOsC Registrant Survey¹ and a separate 2012 survey of registrants' use of online professional development resources.
- Feedback from the GOsC revalidation pilot² conducted over a 12-month period up to September 2012, and from the GOsC's programme of regional engagement events and other consultation exercises.
- Analysis of the GOsC Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Discussion Document consultation feedback.³

¹ GOsC Osteopaths' Opinion Survey. April 2012.

² KPMG Final Report of the Evaluation of the General Osteopathic Council's Revalidation Pilot. February 2013.

³ Published in Spring 2013.

- Current GOsC research exploring osteopathic student behaviours and the experience of newly qualified osteopaths' transition into practice⁴, along with feedback from the GOsC's annual student engagement programme.
- Evidence from GOsC commissioned studies to explore understanding and management of risk associated with osteopathic care⁵, and research into the expectations and experiences of osteopathic patients⁶.
- Feedback from the GOsC Public and Patient Engagement Group, patient focus groups and responses to recent GOsC public consultations.
- Appraisal of the GOsC's effectiveness as a health regulator by the Professional Standards Authority⁷ (formerly CHRE), and good practice across the sector.

External influences

Our 2013-16 Communications and Engagement Strategy takes account also of external developments in the wider healthcare context, including: the Law Commissions' current review of the regulation of healthcare professionals in the UK⁸; findings and recommendations of the Francis Report⁹; public health commissioning strategies and standards across the UK, and the Department of Health's commitment to reducing the cost burden of healthcare regulation.

Key drivers

Our Strategy and the priorities and actions arising from it recognise and respond to a number of key internal and external drivers in our current work and the regulatory environment:

- **Future development of the osteopathic profession:** collaboration between osteopathic organisations is essential to the further development of osteopathic practice, and education and training. We recognise as a priority the GOsC role in fostering links between sectors of the profession, engaging the profession effectively in the development process, and working in partnership with others on joint projects that increase the quality and safety of practice.

⁴ *New Graduates' Preparedness to Practise Research*. Report of a study commissioned by the General Osteopathic Council. Queen Mary University of London. March 2012.

⁵ GOsC adverse events research projects. See: www.osteopathy.org.uk/resources/research/Adverse-events-studies/

⁶ *Investigating osteopathic patients' expectations of private osteopathic care: the OPEN project*. University of Brighton. 2011.

⁷ *The Council for Healthcare Regulatory Excellence Performance review report*. 2011/12.

⁸ *Law Commission, Scottish Law Commission and Northern Ireland Law Commission Joint Consultation Paper on the regulation of healthcare professionals and regulation of social care professionals in England*. 2012.

⁹ *Report of the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Public Inquiry*. February 2013.

- **Minimising practitioner isolation, promoting peer support:** a priority must be the development of an effective regional infrastructure within the osteopathic profession that affords practitioners peer support and learning opportunities, and mitigates the risks posed by practitioner isolation.

The great majority of osteopaths are self-employed practitioners in private practice. Regulation is rarely assisted by the existence of an employer (e.g. the NHS), or a team, to support the maintenance of professional standards. In the absence of these structures, supportive peer networks are essential.

- **Promoting professionalism and quality:** the 2013 Francis Report amplifies the requirement to promote among our registrants recognition and understanding of the duties and responsibilities of regulated healthcare professionals, identifying and encouraging appropriate professional behaviours in practice and in education and training. Assuring the continuing fitness to practise of those on the GOsC Register and promoting a strong culture of patient-centred care, where quality and safety is core and appropriate action is taken if quality and safety are at risk, is central to the GOsC's work.
- **Promoting confidence in the GOsC and osteopathic regulation:** our strategy demonstrates a commitment to fostering a positive, open and transparent culture, encouraging, valuing and acting on feedback. We must ensure also that the GOsC is an authoritative and influential contributor to the regulatory agenda across the UK and internationally, thereby increasing awareness of the contribution of osteopathic regulation to patient safety.
- **Efficiency and cost effectiveness:** the GOsC aims to be a high performing organisation, operating efficient yet cost-effective services. This Strategy ensures we will seek constantly for new and imaginative means of engaging our audiences, embracing emerging technology where this offers our stakeholders an ever-widening range of options for engaging with us.

Our main stakeholders

Our stakeholders can be defined as those bodies, groups or individuals that have an interest or concern in the work of the GOsC, and this represents a wide and diverse audience, with varied needs:

- Members of the public, patients, patient representative groups
- Registrants: existing and prospective
- Osteopathic professional organisations
- Osteopathic education providers
- UK health regulators and the Professional Standards Authority
- Government departments, the Privy Council and Parliament
- Other healthcare professions

- GOsC Council, other non-executives and staff.

Strategic objectives and primary goals

Our Communications and Engagement Strategy is constructed on six high level strategic objectives to be pursued over the life of the current GOsC Corporate Plan (2013-16), with resources and timeframes factored into the annual Business Plans.

Strategic Objective 1 – to ensure the GOsC understands the needs and concerns of the public and patients and that regulatory development reflects societal expectations

Goals:

- To identify knowledge gaps and current concerns/expectations of patients and the public; identify mechanisms to address deficiencies.
- Ensure key areas of GOsC policy development and processes are assessed at the outset to ascertain their patient involvement requirements; increase the level of our direct patient engagement.

Activities:

- Research current public/patient perceptions of osteopathic regulation, revising policy, registrant guidance and GOsC public information to better meet patient/public needs and concerns. Consider conducting a follow-up survey towards end of current Corporate Plan period to measure improvements.
- Increase significantly membership and geographical representation of GOsC Patient Partnership Group, increasing members' sense of engagement, to enhance its effectiveness as a forum for direct patient engagement. Test approval among members. Promote among osteopaths the value of patient involvement in their own work and the GOsC's.
- Expand the opportunity and options for patients, the public and other interested parties to input into our work, notably through an increase in focus group and web-based engagement.
- Gauge changes in levels of patient input to GOsC work over the life of the Corporate Plan to assess effectiveness of the strategy.

Strategic Objective 2 – to increase registrant engagement in the development of osteopathic standards and other regulatory policy, and ensuring GOsC communication mechanisms correspond with osteopaths' needs

Goals:

- To expand the reach and accessibility of GOsC engagement, ensuring provision of information and opportunity for participation are available to registrants in a widening variety of formats.
- Devise communication and consultation strategies, and plans on key areas of policy development, that encourage a breadth and depth of input.

Activities:

- Consult stakeholders on key areas of GOsC policy development and processes, including: continuing fitness to practise, educational quality assurance, development priorities, rule changes, etc.
- Embrace technological developments, including digital and social media options, to increase registrant choice and levels of engagement and foster professional networks.
- Introduce an online forum for registrants and periodically assess effectiveness as a mechanism for engaging and advising osteopaths.
- In response to 2012 survey feedback, revise content, language and presentation of GOsC communications (e.g. registrant-facing information, including *The Osteopath*, e-bulletins, website content and support material). Periodically retest acceptability.
- Ensure regular GOsC contribution to osteopath-hosted events across UK, including GOsC representation at a minimum of 12 osteopathic society meetings per year. Increase GOsC representation at osteopathic stakeholder events hosted by partner organisations (e.g. the British Osteopathic Association, osteopathic educational institutions, the National Council for Osteopathic Research, the Osteopathic Alliance, etc).
- Achieve a high level of attendance at GOsC stakeholder events, with constructive engagement and positive feedback.
- Re-survey registrants towards end of Corporate Plan period to assess impact of GOsC actions arising from 2012 Opinion Survey.

Strategic Objective 3 – to ensure registrants have a clear understanding of what is required of them as health professionals, and that osteopathic practice is in keeping with societal expectations, promoting patient safety and quality of care

Goals

- To increase registrant awareness of the core principles and values of professionalism and the duties and responsibilities of regulated health professionals.

- To achieve a high level of awareness, understanding and application in practice of the Osteopathic Practice Standards (OPS) and supplementary guidance.

Activities:

- *Promoting the Register:* campaign to encourage osteopaths to promote their registration as a mechanism for reinforcing public confidence in osteopathic practice. Revised information and guidance regarding the value of registration, requirements for initial registration and annual renewal. In collaboration with students and osteopathic educational institution staff and faculty, embed in student training understanding of the purpose, value and responsibilities of registration. Review impact of campaign periodically, based on use in practice of a new GOSc registration 'certification mark' and public information; seek ongoing feedback through surveys.
- *Protection of Title (Section 32):* develop and disseminate guidance that encourages osteopaths/others to report unregistered practice, and embeds a clear understanding of the responsibilities of the GOSc and registrants in tackling unlawful use of the title 'osteopath'. Survey registrants to assess changes in attitudes and behaviours (cf 2012 Osteopath Opinion Survey).
- *Reporting concerns:* campaign to embed a clear understanding of the responsibilities and action expected of a health professional to identify and address circumstances that threaten patient safety. In collaboration with partner organisations, foster the development of support and feedback mechanisms for registrants/others who have concerns. Develop and disseminate guidance informed by the recommendations of the 2013 Francis Report. Survey registrants to assess changes in attitudes and behaviours (cf 2012 Osteopath Opinion Survey).
- Maintain and periodically review mechanisms for the dissemination to registrants of information and guidance on wider regulatory issues (e.g. Equality and Diversity, Disclosure and Barring Service, etc).
- *Promoting quality in practice:* develop and provide learning resources (notably online) that promote awareness of and compliance with current standards, and encourages evidence-informed practice. Periodic surveying of registrants to test increasing levels of awareness of standards and professional obligations.
- Promote among registrants, education providers and other osteopathic stakeholder organisations the value of patient involvement in their own work and the GOSc's.

Strategic Objective 4 – to work in partnership with others to reduce practitioner isolation and promote the development of the profession

Goals

- Foster cooperation between GOSc, osteopathic stakeholder organisations (including the British Osteopathic Association, the Council of Osteopathic Educational Institutions, the National Council for Osteopathic Research, and the

Osteopathic Alliance) and regional osteopathic groups to progress the profession's development agenda.

- Identify and implement practical measures to foster regional and local osteopathic networks in order to counter practitioner isolation.

Activities:

- Communications programme, developed in conjunction with partner organisations, to engage osteopaths in the development of the profession, encourage input and wide involvement, and gather feedback. Provide regular updates to ensure transparency and promote confidence.
- Work with the Regional Communications Network, regional groups and other osteopathic organisations to foster peer support networks and promote their expansion across all UK countries. Identify how groups can grow their activities and membership to support CPD activity and act as a local community hub. Actively promote the value of peer networking among registrants, especially newly-qualified osteopaths. Conduct periodic surveys to test attitudes and patterns of peer interaction.
- Work with NCOR to foster the development of a research infrastructure. With partner organisations, support, facilitate and promote osteopathic data collection that will inform the development of the profession. Contribute to the development of learning resources, informed by research, to enhance the quality of osteopathic practice (e.g. adverse events reporting and learning system).

Strategic Objective 5 – to ensure our stakeholders understand, value and have confidence in regulation and the GOsC

Goals

- To increase understanding of the Register and make it more meaningful to patients and the public.
- Among osteopathy students, embed understanding of the role of the GOsC and requirements for initial and continued registration, with emphasis on the importance of this for patient safety.
- To improve understanding of GOsC duties and function.
- To assess and where appropriate improve the quality of the GOsC public and registrant (o zone) websites as an information resource.
- Promote and measure increased awareness and usage of GOsC online services; high level of user satisfaction.
- Embed and demonstrate high standards of customer service in all areas of GOsC operations.

Activities:

- Communications plan to promote public awareness of the Register, what registration means, and the importance of checking the registration status of an osteopath. Address knowledge gaps identified in public/patient survey (2013); conduct follow-up survey to measure improvements.
- Identify opportunities for partnership working across the wider healthcare community to increase knowledge and understanding of osteopathic regulation.
- Student-focused communications programme, including on-campus presentations, dedicated area on the **o** zone, registration information resources; reinforced by GOsC engagement with osteopathic educational institution staff and faculty members. Embed mechanism for feedback to enhance programme.
- Publicise GOsC actions and decisions to promote transparency and improve understanding of GOsC duties and function. Periodic stakeholder surveys to test understanding; adjust strategy as necessary.
- User-testing to analyse quality of GOsC website content and accessibility; identify and implement programme of improvements; test acceptability.
- Survey users of GOsC services to identify where improvements can be made and implement enhancements; test acceptability.
- Publish and promote GOsC customer service policy and keep under review; continue to identify areas for improvement through staff engagement and training; embed feedback mechanisms into all GOsC processes.

Strategic Objective 6 – to position the GOsC as an established and authoritative regulator, influencing the regulatory agenda across the UK and internationally

Goals

- Influence policy at UK and European level
- The development of pan-European osteopathic standards

Activities:

- Participate in and contribute to UK and international professional and regulatory fora (e.g. AURE, UKIPG, AMEE, OIA) and regulatory policy development initiatives (e.g. Law Commissions' Review of Healthcare Regulation, etc), sharing expertise and good practice and identifying opportunities for joint activity.
- Build and maintain effective relationships with key stakeholder organisations responsible for care standards and delivery across the four countries (e.g. CQC, Healthcare Improvement Scotland, Healthwatch England, NICE, SIGN, AQP commissioners, etc).

- Identify and contribute to key policy consultations and events at UK and EU level.
- Engage with osteopathic organisations in Europe and world-wide to promote the development of standards, regulation and free movement of osteopaths.

Monitoring and evaluation

This is a 'live' Strategy that must be flexible and responsive to the changing external environment and evolving operational needs and, as such, is to be kept under regular review.

We will seek to evaluate the success of this Communications and Engagement Strategy in a variety of ways, including, where possible, by setting success measures for each communications project. Methods of evaluating may include:

- Stakeholder surveys and feedback
- Volume of stakeholder participation in events and quality of responses to GOsC consultations
- Publication and e-bulletin reach and website use
- Changes in volume and nature of queries and complaints
- Degree of GOsC influence on wider regulatory agenda
- Value for money
- Professional Standards Authority (formerly CHRE) annual performance review.

This Communications and Engagement Strategy is underpinned by a detailed operational Action Plan, specifying the scope, resources, timeframes and success indicators relating to each specific activity, in order that progress can be monitored and our strategy and planning adapted where necessary to improve effectiveness.