

November 2016

Dear Osteopath

New advertising guidance – how to comply with the rules

Why are we writing to you?

We're writing to all members of the osteopathic profession to share with you some new guidance on how to ensure your advertising complies with the advertising rules. It focuses particularly on claims relating to the treatment of pregnant women, children or babies. The guidance was developed in response to concerns raised about the types of claims being made on osteopaths' websites, and questions from osteopaths themselves about whether claims to treat those particular patient groups complied with the rules.

In producing the attached document, the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) has worked closely with the Institute of Osteopathy to help understand the perspectives of osteopaths and ensure the guidance addresses the types of claims that are commonly made. We consider the document provides the clarity needed and gives guidance about key principles to follow when preparing your advertising, along with practical examples of claims which are, and are not, likely to be acceptable.

Please now review the claims on your website and ensure your advertising complies with the guidance. Failure to do so may result in a complaint that your advertising breaks the rules and regulatory enforcement action being taken.

What is the ASA?

The ASA is the UK's independent regulator of advertising across all media, including advertisers' claims on their own websites and social media spaces. Its role is to ensure ads are legal, decent, honest and truthful by undertaking proactive projects and acting on complaints to take action against misleading, harmful and offensive adverts. The ASA administers and enforces the rules set out in the UK Code of Non-broadcast Advertising and Direct & Promotional Marketing (CAP Code).

The *Osteopathic Practice Standards* place a duty on all osteopaths to ensure their advertising complies with the CAP Code (Standard D14). Failing to comply with the Code and associated guidance or rulings could result in GOsC fitness to practise proceedings.

What does the guidance say?

As regulated health professionals, osteopaths may refer to treating specific population groups such as pregnant women, children and babies. However, at present there is limited or no evidence for the effectiveness of osteopathy in treating conditions specific to those groups, such as colic or morning sickness. Because the ASA has not been presented with

evidence to substantiate such claims, osteopaths must avoid claiming or implying in their advertising that they can treat those types of conditions, including in any testimonials.

What does that mean for me?

The purpose of the attached guidance is to provide a framework within which osteopaths can market their products and services in compliance with the CAP Code. Claims such as "osteopathy is a gentle treatment suitable for children and babies" or "pregnancy can cause general aches and pains including joint and back pain and osteopathy could help" are likely to be acceptable. But claims such as "If your baby suffers from colic or excessive crying osteopathy could help" or "osteopathy can help your baby recover from the trauma of birth" are unlikely to be acceptable. These are just a handful of examples, and the guidance provides further details and examples.

In response to the more detailed guidance on claims for osteopathic care of pregnant women, children and babies issued by the ASA, CAP has updated its online advice article on osteopathy to include advice on claims relating to pregnant women, children and babies. This can be viewed online at: <https://www.cap.org.uk/Advice-Training-on-the-rules/Advice-Online-Database/Therapies-Osteopathy.aspx>.

What do I need to do?

You should now review the information in the attached document and assess whether your website and advertising complies with the guidance. If it does not, then you must make any necessary changes as soon as possible, including to any other marketing communications you might produce e.g. leaflets, classified ads etc.

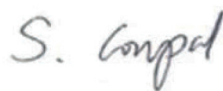
We recognise that osteopaths provide a service to a wide range of patients and we have no desire to stand in the way of the marketing of osteopathy services, providing that advertising is responsible and, in particular, that claims about the efficacy of treatment options can be backed up by robust evidence in all cases.

Yours faithfully




Guy Parker

Chief Executive Advertising
Standards Authority



Shahriar Coupal

Director of the Committees
Committee of Advertising
Practice



Tim Walker

Chief Executive and Registrar
General Osteopathic Council

Enclosure: *Osteopathy: ASA review and guidance for marketing claims for pregnant women, children and babies*