

Perceptions: Public and Patients

On behalf of the General Osteopathic Council

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Background

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 the study is to provide the GOsC with insight into public and patient perceptions of osteopathic care and regulation.

This study now includes eight years' worth of data, building on the findings from two previous pieces of research undertaken in 2014 and 2018. Where appropriate, comparisons have been made with previous years.

Approach and sample profile

Consistent with previous waves, the findings are based on two groups:

- A nationally representative sample of UK adults aged 18+
- Osteopathic patients (i.e. those who have visited an osteopath in the past 12 months)

All data was collected by YouGov using online research methods. Fieldwork was undertaken between 20 January and 12 February 2023.

The table below shows the demographic profile of both groups:

	UK adults	Osteopathy patients
<i>Total</i>	1014	502
Age		
18 to 24	84	6
25 to 34	148	19
35 to 44	167	44
45 to 54	159	44
55 to 64	162	102
65+	294	287
Gender		
Male	465	194
Female	549	308
Region		
North East	51	7
North West	94	32
Yorkshire and the Humber	94	23
East Midlands	86	37
West Midlands	79	24

	UK adults	Osteopathy patients
East of England	83	56
London	118	85
South East	151	120
South West	97	71
Wales	55	15
Scotland	78	32
Northern Ireland	28	-
Social grade		
ABC1	602	385
C2DE	412	89
Ethnicity		
White	911	482
Ethnic minority	66	10
Has a disability/ long-term health condition		
Yes	335	211
No	672	290

The UK adults ‘general public’ sample is nationally representative, meaning controls were applied to ensure the distribution of participants across key demographics accurately reflects the UK population. The osteopathy patients sample is not representative due to the niche nature of the sample and lack of official statistics, meaning there are no ‘known’ population demographics to compare against. Nonetheless, the distribution of the osteopathy patients sample is broadly consistent with the characteristics collected in previous years.

Guidance on analysis

Throughout the report, ‘osteopathic patients’ are defined as people who have visited an osteopath in the past 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 within charts by a red or green triangle. These figures are considered statistically significant and identify a true difference in opinion – however, this may or may not be considered significant in terms of future policy and/ or strategy.

As has been done previously, throughout the report significant differences between groups within the UK public are highlighted to show where views differ by key demographics.

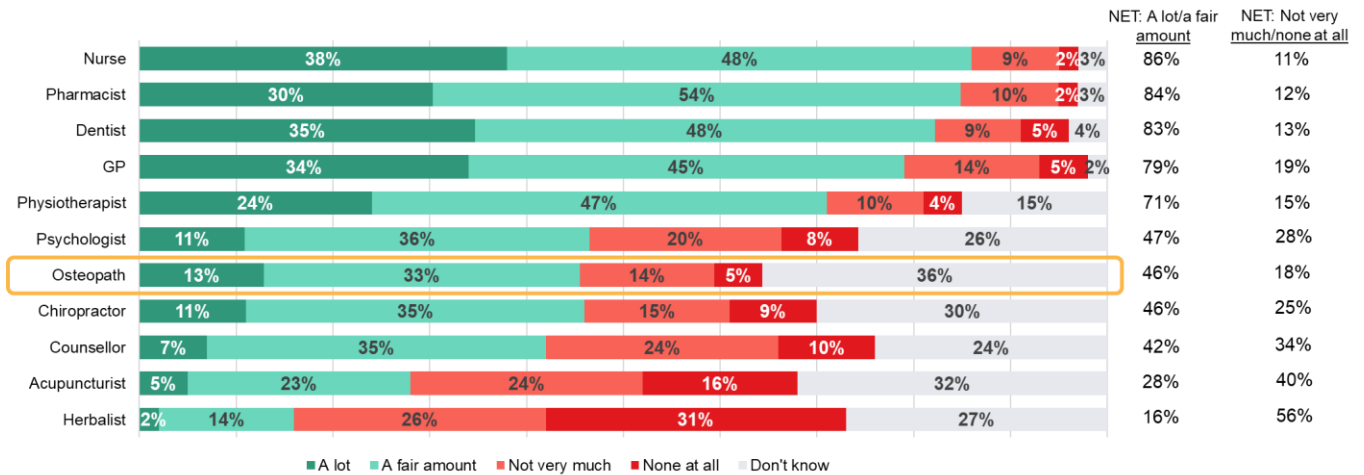
Confidence in healthcare professionals

Around half of the general public have confidence in getting advice/ treatment from osteopaths, and they rank around the middle across all healthcare professionals polled. While almost half of the general public (46%) say they have a lot or a fair amount of confidence in an osteopath, confidence in nurses (86%), pharmacists (84%), dentists (83%), GPs (79%), and physiotherapists (71%) is higher. However, confidence in osteopaths is higher than counsellors (42%), acupuncturists (28%), and herbalists (17%). Levels of confidence in chiropractors (46%) are in line with osteopaths. Since the previous two waves, while osteopaths continue to rank broadly around the middle across the healthcare professionals polled, overall confidence in osteopaths has steadily decreased. This trend does not appear to be evident across any other healthcare profession included in the polling.

However, this is driven by fewer people saying they have a *fair* amount of confidence, as there is no significant change in those who feel strongly (have a lot of confidence) – with 33% reporting a fair amount of confidence this wave, compared to 38% in 2018 and 40% in 2014. Those in lower social grades appear to have driven this fall in confidence: previously, there was no significant difference across social grades (39% ABC1 vs 38% C2DE) but, in 2023, lower social grades are less likely to say they are fairly confident (38% ABC1 vs 26% C2DE) and instead have become much more unsure (45% C2DE).

Recent osteopathic patients surveyed are significantly more likely than the general public to have confidence in an osteopath; over nine in 10 (96%) have a lot or fair amount of confidence in osteopaths. More specifically, two-thirds (65%) of patients say they have a lot of confidence in an osteopath compared to 13% of the general public. This trend has been consistent across all three waves. The public are more likely than patients to say they have not very much or no confidence at all (18% vs 3%), but the difference between the public and patients is likely driven by a lack of understanding – the public's most common response is "don't know" if they have confidence or not (36% vs 1% patients).

Figure 1. Confidence in each healthcare professional



Base: All UK adults (1,014)

Q: How much confidence, if any, do you have in receiving healthcare advice and/or treatment from each of the following health professionals?

Now, when examining each factor’s importance in giving the public confidence in healthcare professionals, nine in 10 say providing good advice and treatment (92%), having a recognised level of education/ training (91%), and being required to keep knowledge and skills up-to-date (91%) are important. While the findings regarding advice and treatment and keeping skills up-to-date are consistent with the previous waves, there has been a decrease in the proportion who say having a recognised level of education training are important (91% vs 94% in 2014).

Osteopathic patients are significantly more likely than the general public to say all of these are important. For example, 98% of patients say having a recognised level of education and training is important, compared to 91% of the public. Additionally, patients are also more likely than the general public to identify being monitored by a regulatory body (96% vs 88%) and having indemnity insurance (86% vs 76%) as important.

Though a large majority still identifies being monitored by a regulatory body as important, compared to previous waves, the public is finding this slightly less important for instilling confidence in healthcare professionals over time, with 88% saying this is important in 2023, compared to 91% in 2018 and 92% in 2014. And while a strong majority still find it important for healthcare professionals to have links to the NHS, this proportion has also seen a slight decrease (70% in 2023, compared to 75% in 2018 and 2014) as well as working on their own (11% in 2023, compared to 17% in 2018 and 18% in 2014).

The decrease in importance of monitoring of a regulatory body and links to the NHS are particularly driven by people from ethnic minority backgrounds – in 2014, 89% of ethnic minority respondents said monitoring by a regulatory body was important, compared to 80% in 2018 and 70% in 2023. Similarly, 73% of respondents from an ethnic minority in 2014 said having links to the NHS are important, falling to 70% in 2018, and only 51% in 2023.

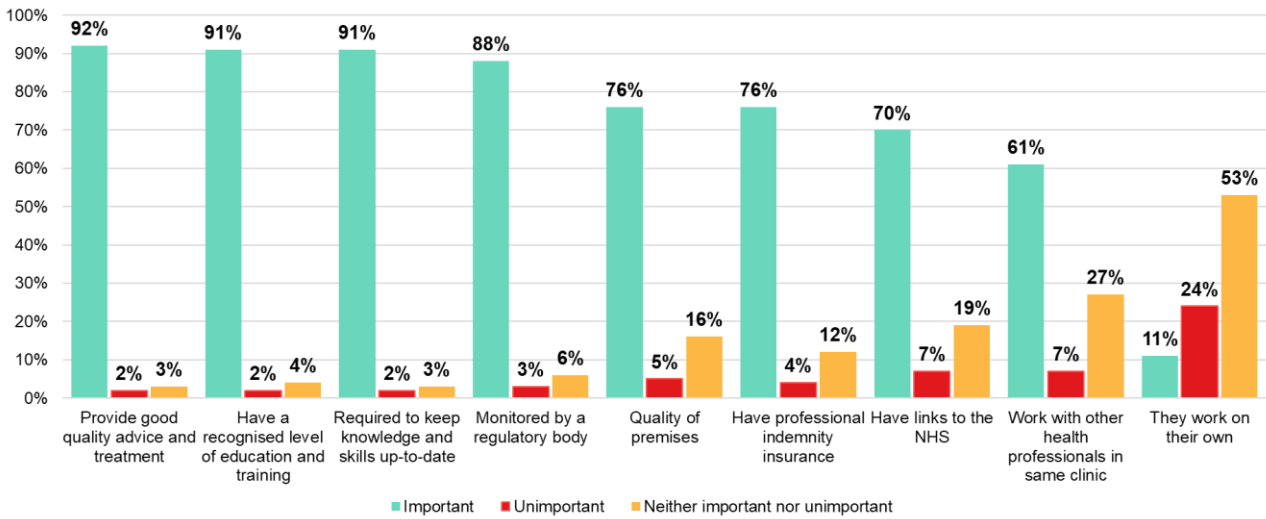
In 2023, those under 25 years of age are much less likely than older respondents to consider most areas important to instilling confidence. This is particularly evident for being monitored by a regulatory body (58% 18-24, 94% 65+), having links to the NHS (51% 18-24, 76% 65+), having a recognised level of education/ training (69% 18-24, 96% 65+), being required to keep knowledge and skills up-to-date (72% 18-24, 97% 65+), and providing good quality advice and treatment (78% 18-24, 97% 65+).

Further, there are significant differences in what those in different social grades say is important to provide confidence. Those in higher social grades are more likely than those lower ones to identify having a recognised level of education/ training (94% ABC1 vs 87% C2DE), being monitored by a regulatory body (91% vs 85%), requirement to keep knowledge and skills up-to-date (94% vs 88%), and proving good quality advice and treatment (95% vs 88%). Whereas, the only factor those in lower social grades identify as important more than those in higher social grades is the healthcare professional working on their own (15% ABC1 vs 9% C2DE). Additionally, women are more likely to say that having indemnity insurance is important to provide confidence in healthcare professionals compared to men (79% vs 73%).

Generally speaking, as importance decreases, more people respond with neither important nor unimportant; therefore, as people find each factor less important, they are remaining more neutral as opposed to simply finding it unimportant.

The factor that the public find least important in their providing confidence in healthcare professionals are whether they work on their own. While only one in 10 find this important (11%), a quarter who find it unimportant (24%) and over half are neutral (53%).

Figure 2. Importance of each factor providing confidence in healthcare professionals



Base: All UK adults (1,014)

Q: How important or unimportant are each of the following factors in giving you confidence in receiving advice and/ or treatment from a healthcare professional?

When asked to examine all of these factors together and choose the top three most important, about half selected providing good quality advice and treatment (52%), having a recognised level of education/ training (46%), or being required to keep their knowledge and skills up-to-date (45%). This was closely followed by 41% who say being monitored by a regulatory body.

Men say having links to the NHS is among their top three at higher rates than women (23% vs 17%). As seen previously, those under 25 are less likely to cite keeping knowledge and skills up-to-date as important (27%), being monitored by a regulatory body (27%), or having links to the NHS (13%). However, when asked to choose their top three, the age difference disappears in the consideration of good quality advice/ treatment (45% 18-24, 52% 65+) or having a recognised level of education/ training (40% vs 50%).

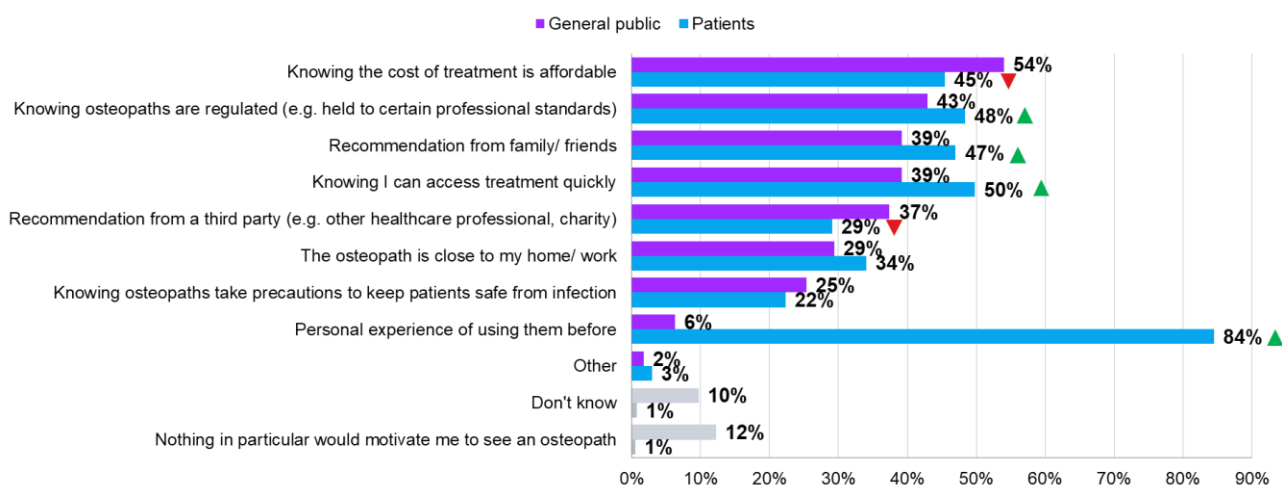
Deciding to visit an osteopath: information needs

For osteopathic patients, personal experience is the main driver of choosing osteopathy over other medical/ healthcare professionals (84%). Around half say that ‘knowing I can access treatment quickly’ (50%), regulation (48%), or recommendation from a family member/ friend (47%) would encourage them to go to an osteopath.

If UK adults were experiencing an issue, they thought an osteopath could treat, over half say that knowing the cost is affordable would motivate them to see an osteopath over other medical professionals (54%). This is broadly consistent across household income levels (50% under £15k, 57% £50k+), but those from higher incomes are more likely to be motivated by knowing osteopaths are regulated (33% under £15k, 48% £50k+) or knowing they can be treated quickly (38% under £15k, 44% £50k+).

There is an upward trend by age for considering the convenient location of an osteopath, with younger respondents less likely to say the osteopath being close to their home/ work would motivate them (14% 18 to 24, 34% 65+).

Figure 3. Hypothetical motivations to see an osteopath over other medical/ healthcare professional



Base: All UK adults (1014); All osteopathic patients (502)

Q: Please imagine you have an issue you think an osteopath could treat. Which, if any, of the following would motivate you to seek advice/ treatment from an osteopath over another type of medical/ healthcare professional?

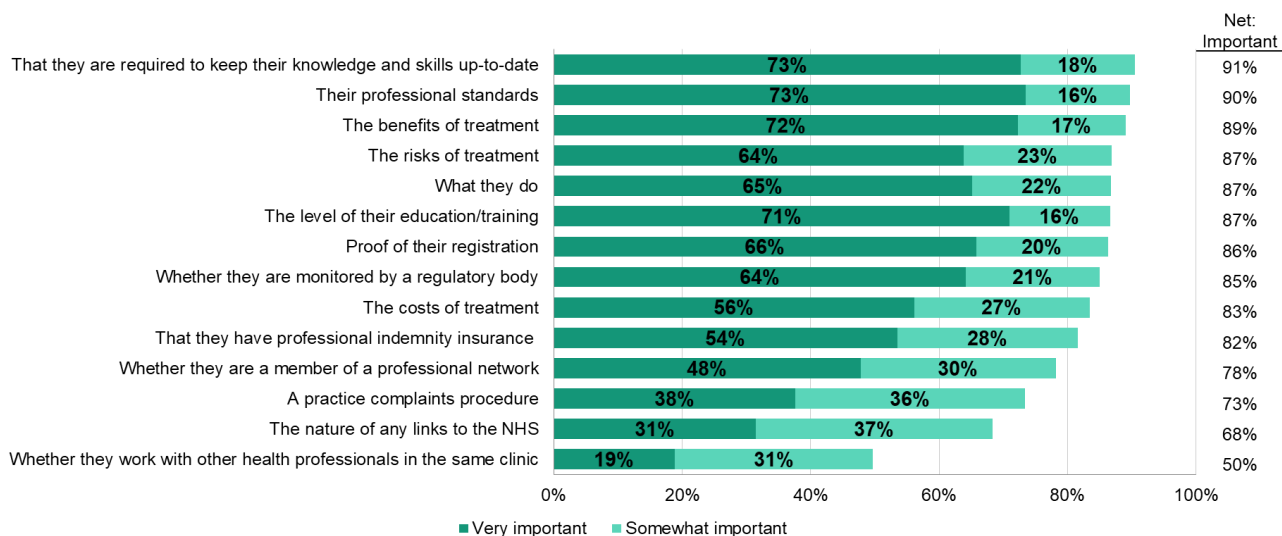
When thinking about what information is important when deciding to visit an osteopath, just under three-quarters of UK adults who have never visited an osteopath say it is very important to know that osteopaths are required to keep their knowledge and skills up-to-date (73%), information on their professional standards (73%), and the benefits of

treatment (72%). Broadly, this is unchanged versus previous years – professional standards and benefits of treatment have always figured in the top answers and the importance of keeping skills up-to-date is consistent with its inclusion in 2018.

Older respondents tend to be more likely than younger respondents to say that all types of information are important to them if deciding to visit an osteopath – for example, only 70% of those aged 18 to 24 think knowing professional standards are important, compared to 97% of those aged 65 and over.

There has been an increase in the proportion of the public thinking information about professional indemnity insurance is important – rising from 77% in 2018 to 82% in 2023. This has particularly been driven by younger respondents – in 2018, only 57% of under 25s thought indemnity insurance was important information, compared to 65% in 2023. There has been no change amongst older respondents (86% 65+, both years) but, as noted above, they are already more likely to consider information important.

Figure 4. Importance of information in deciding whether to visit an osteopath (hypothetical)

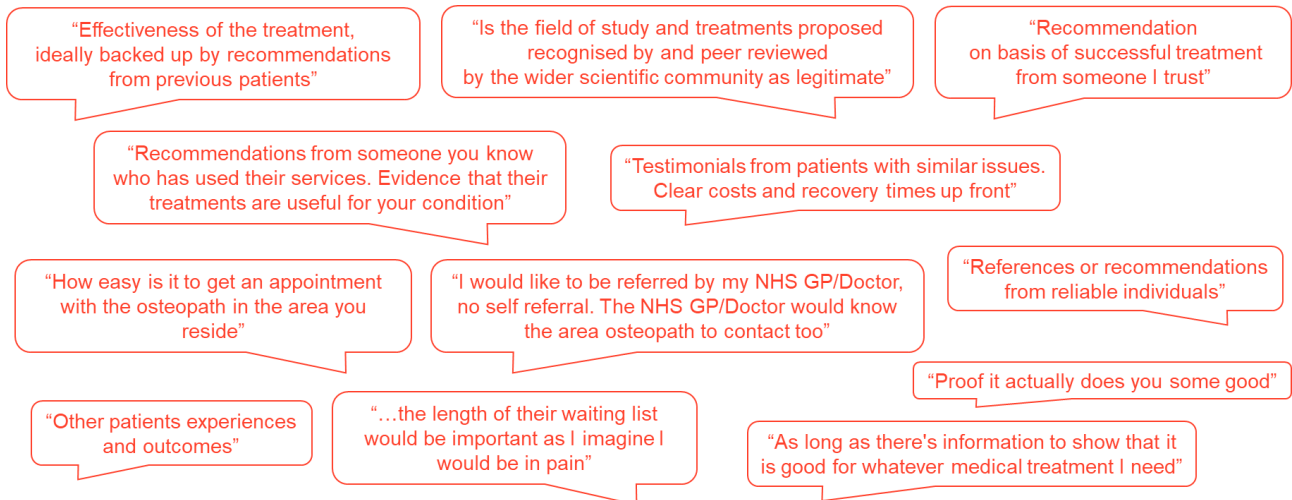


Base: All UK adults who have never seen an osteopath (895)

Q: Imagine you are deciding whether or not to see an osteopath for treatment. How important or unimportant would information on the following factors be in helping you make your decision?

When asked what other information would be helpful in making a decision to see an osteopath or not, recommendations and testimonials are key. Personal recommendations from friends/ family or referrals from trusted figures like GPs/ NHS doctors are particularly valued. Some respondents would want information about the efficacy of treatment, whether in the form of peer-reviewed science or testimonials on other patient outcomes.

Figure 5. Other information important when deciding whether to visit an osteopath

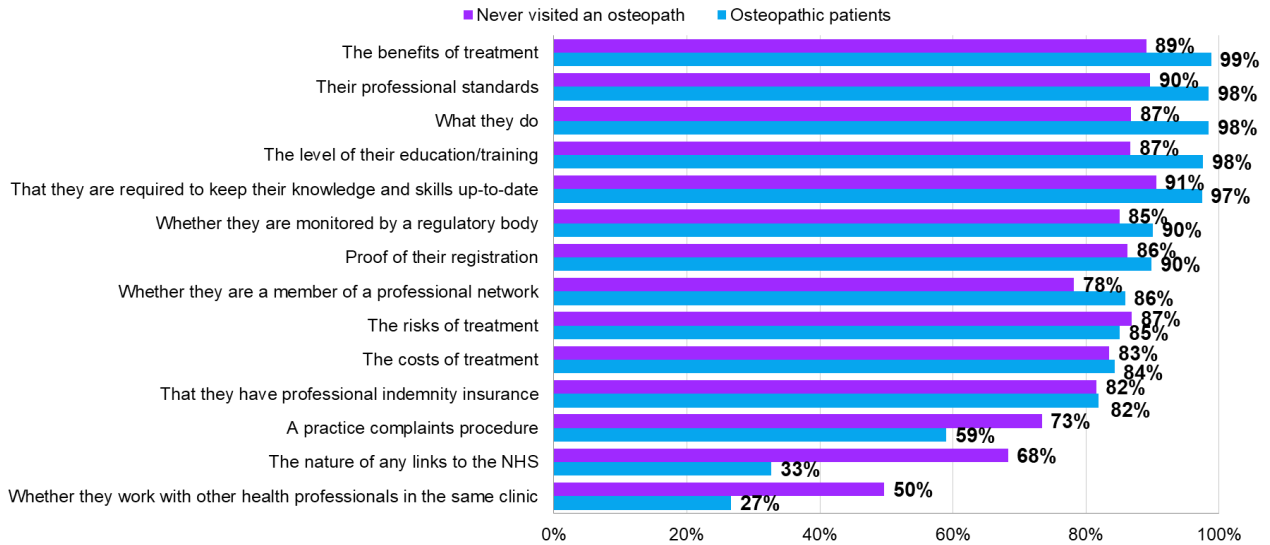


Q: Still imagining that you are deciding whether or not to see an osteopath for treatment, is there any other information that would be important in helping you make your decision?

For osteopathic patients, the benefits of treatment (99%) and the osteopath's professional standards (98%) remain in the topmost important pieces of information when deciding to visit an osteopath. The same proportion say that what the osteopath does (98%) or their level of education/ training (98%) was important to them when making their decision.

Information about complaints procedures is less important to patients (59%) than people who have never visited an osteopath before (73%), as are the nature of any links to the NHS (33% vs 68%) and whether they work with other health professionals in the same clinic (27% vs 50%).

Figure 6. Other information important when deciding whether to visit an osteopath

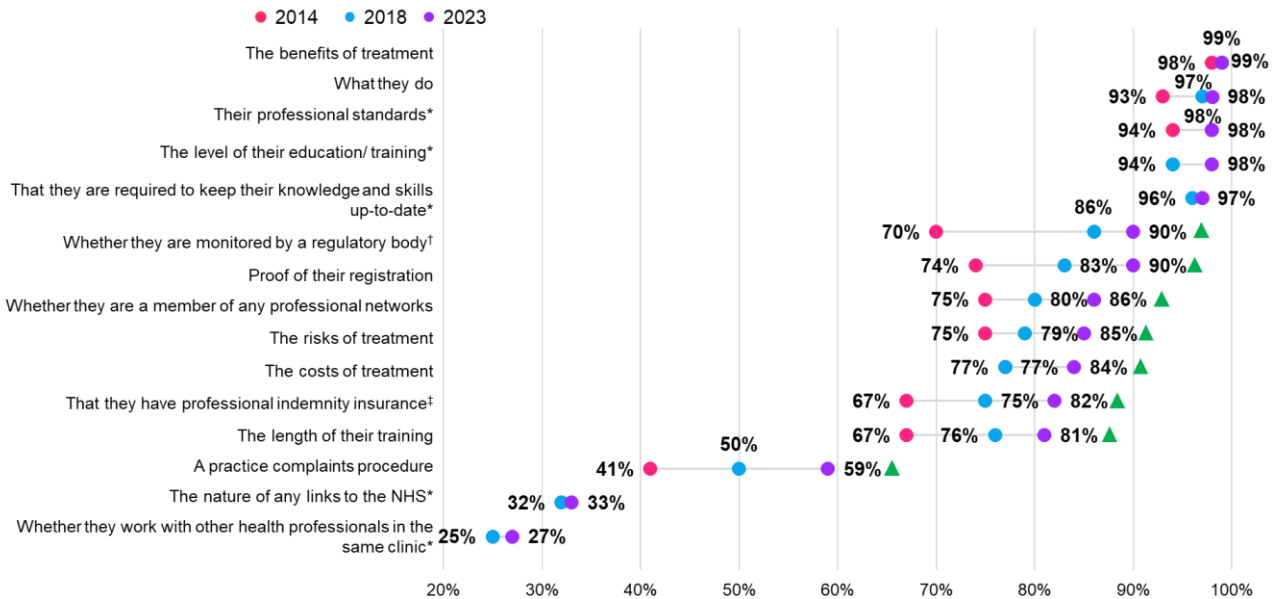


Base: All UK adults who have never seen an osteopath (895)/ Base: All osteopathic patients (502)

Q: Imagine you are deciding whether or not to see an osteopath for treatment. How important or unimportant would information on the following factors be in helping you make your decision? Please think back to when you were deciding whether or not to see an osteopath for treatment. How important or unimportant would information on the following factors have been in helping you make your decision?

Osteopathic patients are getting more cognisant of the importance of information prior to getting treatment – most pieces of information are seen as more important than they were in 2014. In particular, only seven in 10 said information about being monitored by a regulator was important to them in 2014 (70%), rising to nine out of 10 in 2023 (90%). There has also been a similar rise in the reported importance of information about complaints procedures (41% 2014, 50% 2018, 59% 2023), proof of registration (74% 2014, 83% 2018, 90% 2023), and professional indemnity insurance (75% 2018, 82% 2023).

Figure 7. Importance of information in deciding whether to visit an osteopath (experienced)



Base: All osteopathic patients (2023: 502; 2018: 500; 2014: 523)

Q: Please think back to when you were deciding whether or not to see an osteopath for treatment. How important or unimportant would information on the following factors have been in helping you make your decision?

*not included in 2014. †2014 wording was “Whether they are overseen by a regulator”. ‡2014 wording was “They have an insurance policy in case something goes wrong”.

Changing sentiment amongst men appear to have driven some of these changes. There was a six-percentage point difference between male and female osteopathic patients considering information about regulatory monitoring in 2014 (66% men, 72% women). This falls to a difference of a single percentage point in 2023 (89% men, 91% women).

Similarly, in 2018, there was a four-percentage point difference in male and female patients saying information about professional indemnity insurance was important to them. In 2023, consideration across both genders has increased – with minimal differences across the genders (81% male, 82% female).

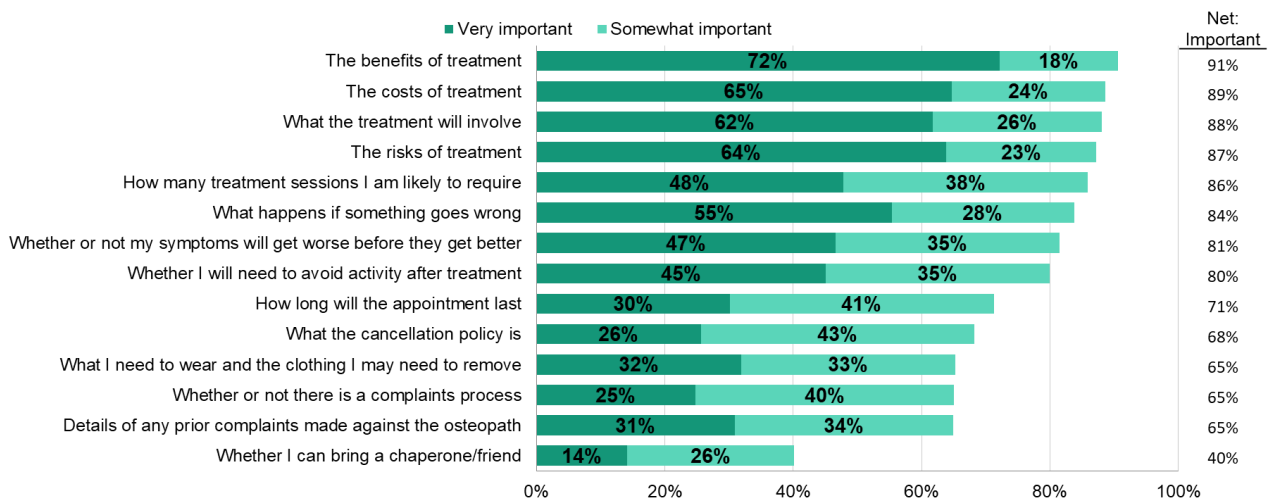
When UK adults were asked to imagine what information would be important prior to their first visit, around nine in 10 mention the benefits (91%), costs (89%), what the treatment will involve (88%) or the risks of treatment (87%). This is broadly similar for osteopathic patients – over nine in 10 say it is important to have information about the benefits of treatment (95%), while just under say it is important to know the costs (86%), what the treatment will involve (86%), or the risks (86%).

Across the general public, older respondents tend to be more likely than younger respondents to think each piece of information is important – there is a particularly large

rising trend by age for wanting to know the benefits of treatment ahead of an initial visit (75% 18 to 24, 97% 65+). Similarly, women tend to be more likely than men to think various information is important – but they are particularly keen to know information around what clothing they may need to wear/ remove (74% vs 55% men) or if they can bring a chaperone/ friend (49% vs 31% men).

Those with a disability are more likely than those without to want to know ahead of time if there is a complaints process in the event, they are unhappy with treatment (71% vs 62%).

Figure 8. Importance of information prior to first visit



Base: All UK adults (1,014)

Q: And if you were scheduling an appointment with an osteopath, how important, if at all, would the following information be to you in advance of your first visit?

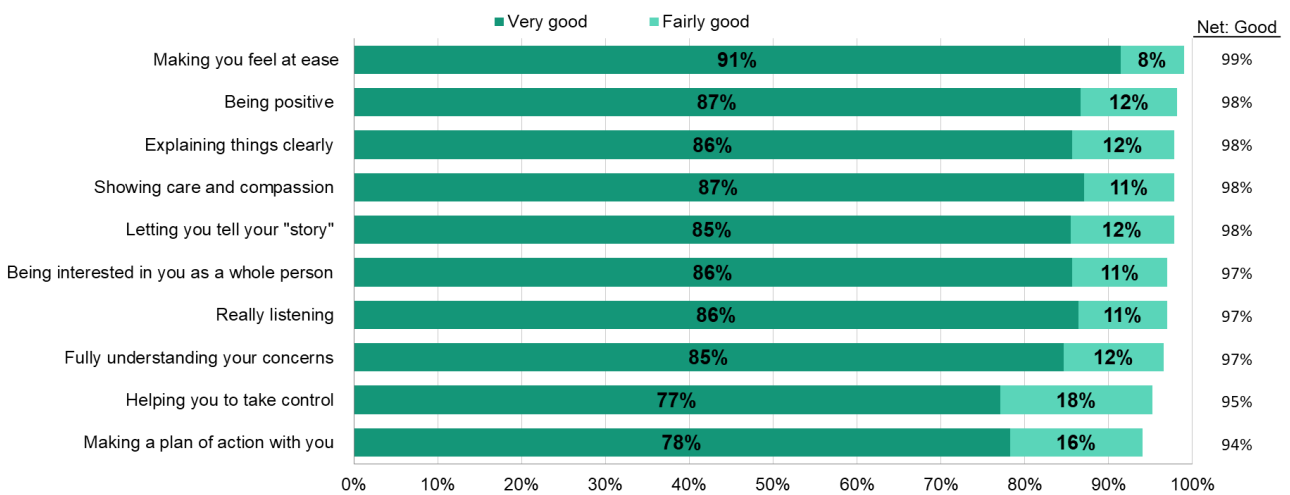
With many keen to know the benefits and risks of osteopathy, the UK public would turn to online sources or people they trust to find out more. This includes general searches for further information on the treatment or clinic, as well as looking for information on regulation. Some people would talk to other healthcare professionals such as their GP or look for information on an NHS website. Others would talk directly to the osteopath about the benefits and risks of the treatment they would conduct.

Experience of visiting an osteopath

Over nine in 10 osteopathic patients surveyed thought their osteopath was very or fairly good during their most recent visit. In particular, almost all say the osteopath was very good at making them feel at ease (91%) and nearly nine in 10 said their osteopath was very good at being positive (87%) or showing care and compassion (87%).

Women tend to be more likely than men to say that their osteopath was very good at each activity, especially in being interested in them as a whole person (92%, 76% men). Men do have positive perceptions of their osteopath but are less emphatic about it – they tend to say their most recent visit was *fairly* good.

Figure 10. How good most recent visit to an osteopath was



Base: All osteopathy patients (502)

Q: Thinking about your most recent visit to an osteopath, how poor or good do you feel the osteopath was at the following?

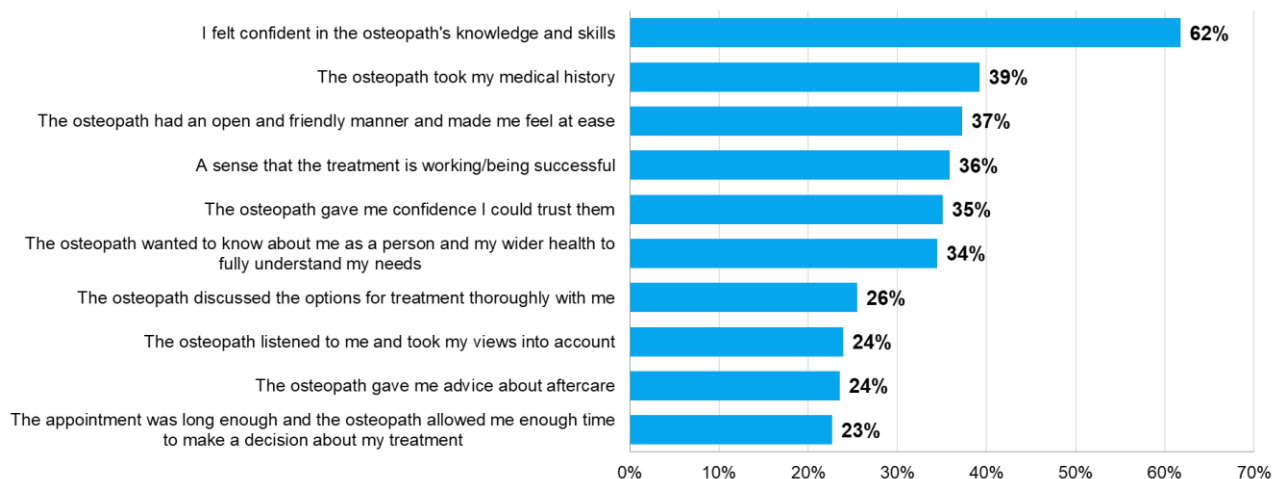
When asked what is most important in giving them a positive experience of osteopathy, the majority of patients want to feel confident in their osteopath’s knowledge and skills (62%). This is consistent with previous findings (61% in 2018) and, in fact, none of the factors have shifted significantly over time.

In 2023, women are more likely than men to prioritise a well-rounded experience that takes account of them as a whole person – they are more likely than men to say it is important for the osteopath to know about them and their wider health (39%, 27% in 2018), for the osteopath to take their medical history (44%, 32% in 2018), and that the osteopath’s approach to be holistic (24%, 14% in 2018). Men are more likely to say it is important for

the osteopath to give them a diagnosis (30%, 18% in 2018), or that the osteopath discusses treatment options thoroughly (31%, 22% in 2018).

Information about the osteopath being registered/ regulated is particularly welcomed by patients from lower social grades (28% C2DE vs 17% ABC1) and those with a disability (24%, 16% no disability).

Figure 11. Most important factors to give positive experience (top 10)



Base: All osteopathy patients (502)

Q: Which of the following factors, if any, are MOST important in giving you a positive experience of osteopathy? (up to five selections allowed)

Clear communication from osteopaths is key and has become particularly important. There has been a significant increase in the proportion who say the osteopath listening to what they have to say is very important in building their confidence in that osteopath (85% vs 72% 2018). This has seen a sharp increase compared to 2018, as has the importance of the osteopath asking permission before examination or treatment (48% vs 41% 2018).

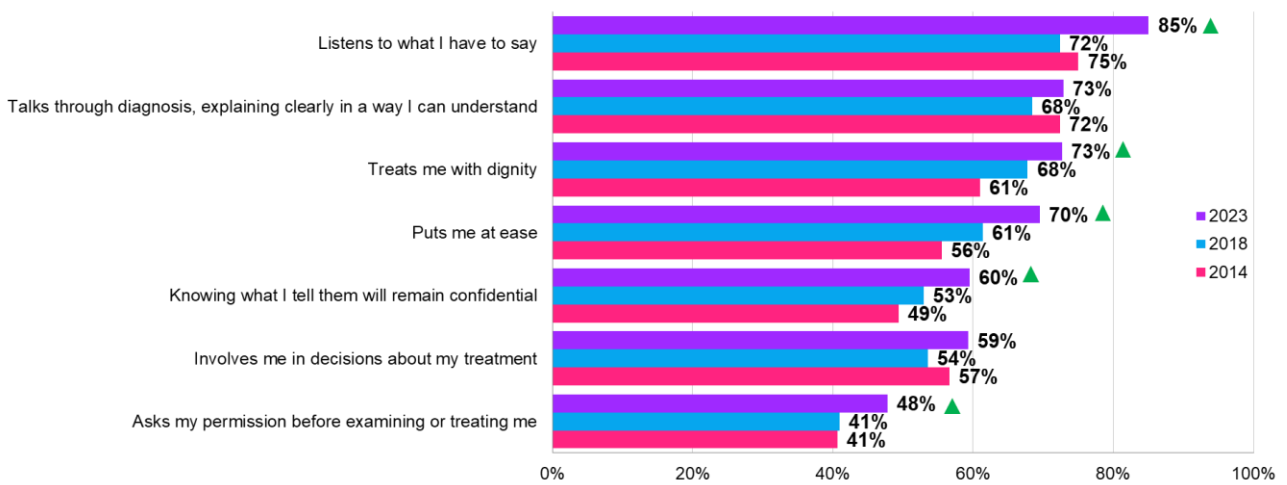
In figure 12, it is evident that there has been a sustained increase for patients thinking it is very important the osteopath treats them with dignity (73% 2023, 68% 2018, 61% 2014), puts them at ease (70% 2023, 61% 2018, 56% 2014), or that the osteopath will keep discussions confidential (60% 2023, 53% 2018, 49% 2014). Most of these changes have been driven by a fall in the proportion thinking they are 'fairly' confident – patients have got more emphatic over time.

As seen earlier, women tend to be more likely than men to provide strong opinions and this difference is preserved over time. In 2018, two-thirds of men said the osteopath listening to what they had to say was important, compared to nearly eight in 10 women

(64%, 78%). In 2023, three-quarters (77%) of men say this is important, compared to nine in 10 women (90%).

However, those from lower social grades appear to have driven some of the change in perception. Since 2018, there has been an increase across social grades for thinking it is important for osteopaths to ‘listen to what I have to say’ but a larger increase for lower social grades means those from lower social grades are now significantly more likely to say this (84% ABC1, 92% C2DE), where there was no difference before (both 72% in 2018).

Figure 12. Importance of factors in giving confidence (% very important)



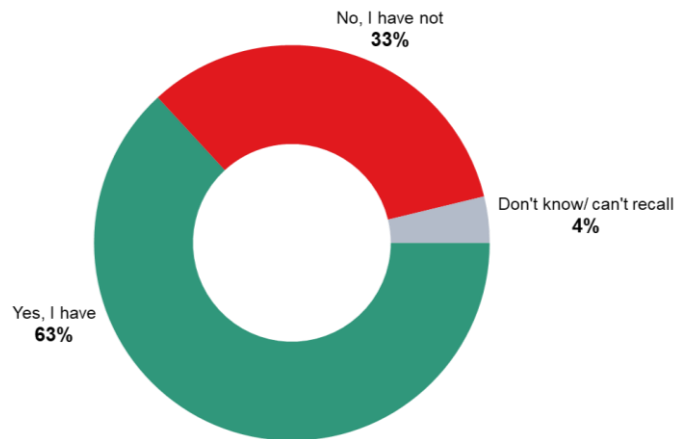
Base: All osteopathy patients (502)

Q: How important or unimportant are each of the following factors in affecting the confidence you have in an osteopath?

More than three-fifths of patients surveyed say that, in the past two years, they have seen an osteopath because it was faster than seeking advice/ treatment from a GP (63%).

Women are much more likely to report this than men (70%, 53%), but there are minimal other demographic differences.

Figure 13. Seen an osteopath in the past two years because it was faster than a GP



Base: All osteopathy patients (502)

Q: In the past two years, have you ever sought advice/ treatment from an osteopath because it was faster than seeking advice/ treatment from a GP?

A quarter of UK adults who have seen an osteopath at some point in the past (whether in the past 12 months or before) report that they have sought advice/ treatment from one in the past two years because it was faster than speaking to a GP (24%).

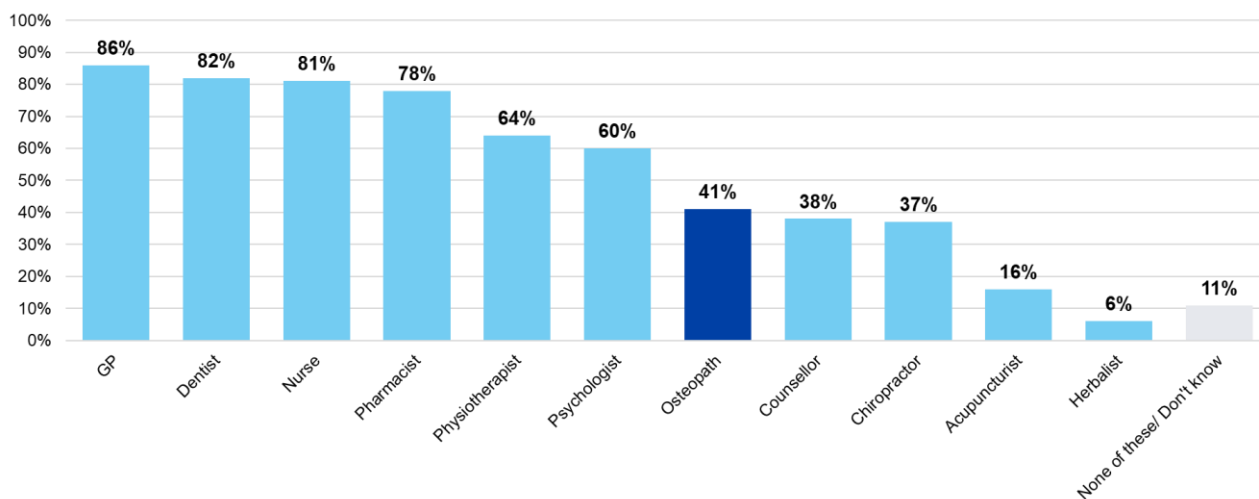
Professional standards and the GOsC

Looking at perceptions of regulation among various healthcare professions, again osteopaths rank around the middle of all healthcare professionals with four in 10 (41%) people saying they think osteopaths are regulated. Osteopathic patients are about twice as likely than the general public to know osteopaths are regulated (78% vs 41%).

The healthcare professionals who come out on top largely mirror who the public say they have the most confidence in, with the most regulated healthcare professions seen as GPs (86%), dentists (82%), nurses (81%), and pharmacists (78%), closely followed by physiotherapists (64%), and psychologists (60%). The professionals people believe are less regulated than osteopaths are counsellors (38%), chiropractors (37%), acupuncturists (16%), and herbalists (6%). These remain consistent across all three waves.

Young people (18-24s) are less likely than every other age group to say that osteopaths are regulated (15%), though this is not specific to osteopaths as this trend persists across all healthcare professions.

Figure 14. Public perceptions of which healthcare professionals are regulated



Base: All UK adults (1,014)

Q: Which of the following healthcare professionals, if any, do you think are regulated?
By regulation, we mean there are legal rules that govern their behaviour, actions and conduct, and where action may be taken if these rules aren't met.

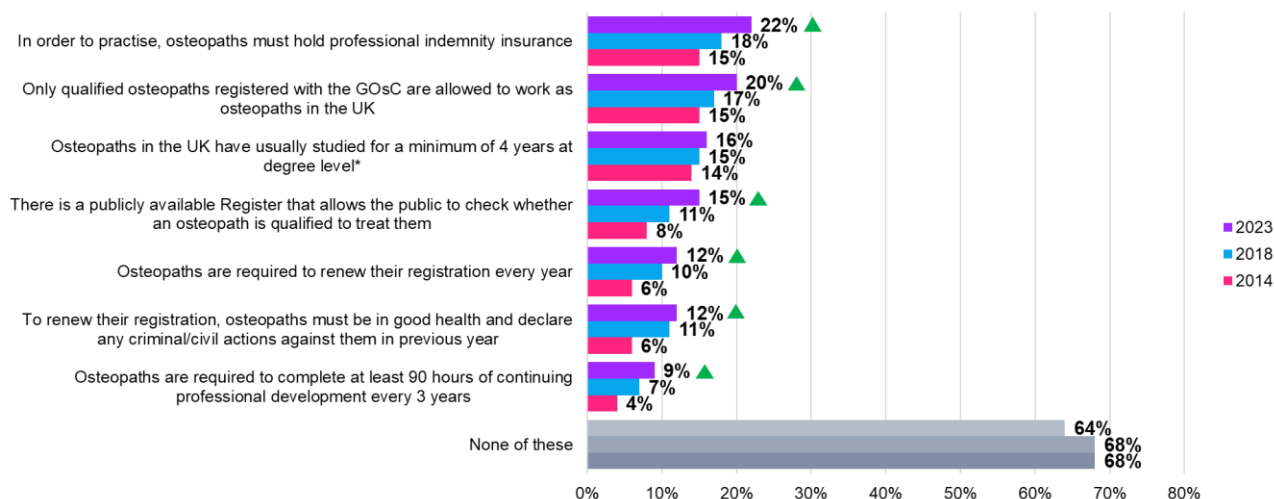
When examining the general public's awareness of the requirements osteopaths must meet, people are generally becoming more aware of all rules. Though almost two-thirds (64%) of the public remain unaware of any of these, there has been a steady increase in awareness of almost every listed rule since previous years.

Compared to 2014, the public are more aware of most rules. Each wave there has been an increased awareness of osteopaths' requirement to hold indemnity insurance (15% 2014, 18% 2018, 22% 2023), and of the public Register to check an osteopath's qualifications (8% 2014, 11% 2018, 15% 2023). Osteopathic patients are also more likely to be aware of all listed rules than the general public.

Changing sentiments in those of a lower social grade appear to be driving some of the changes in awareness of indemnity insurance. There was a six-percentage point difference between those in higher and lower social grade's awareness of requirements of having indemnity insurance in 2014 (18% ABC1, 12% C2DE). This falls to a difference of a single percentage point in 2023 (21% ABC1, 22% C2DE).

Similarly, some of the changes in awareness of the public Register are being driven by older people. Older people in the general public are becoming more aware of the Register compared to young people's awareness, which has remained unchanged; in 2014, there was a six-percentage difference between 18-24s and 65+ people (4% 18-24, 10% 65+), compared to an increased 13-point percentage difference in 2023 (5% 18-24, 18% 65+).

Figure 15. Awareness of rules osteopaths must follow



Base: All UK adults (1,014)

Q: Before starting this survey, which of the following rules that osteopaths need to follow, if any, were you aware of?

*note: wording in 2014/2018 was 'Osteopathic practice requires training to university degree level with a minimum of four years study'

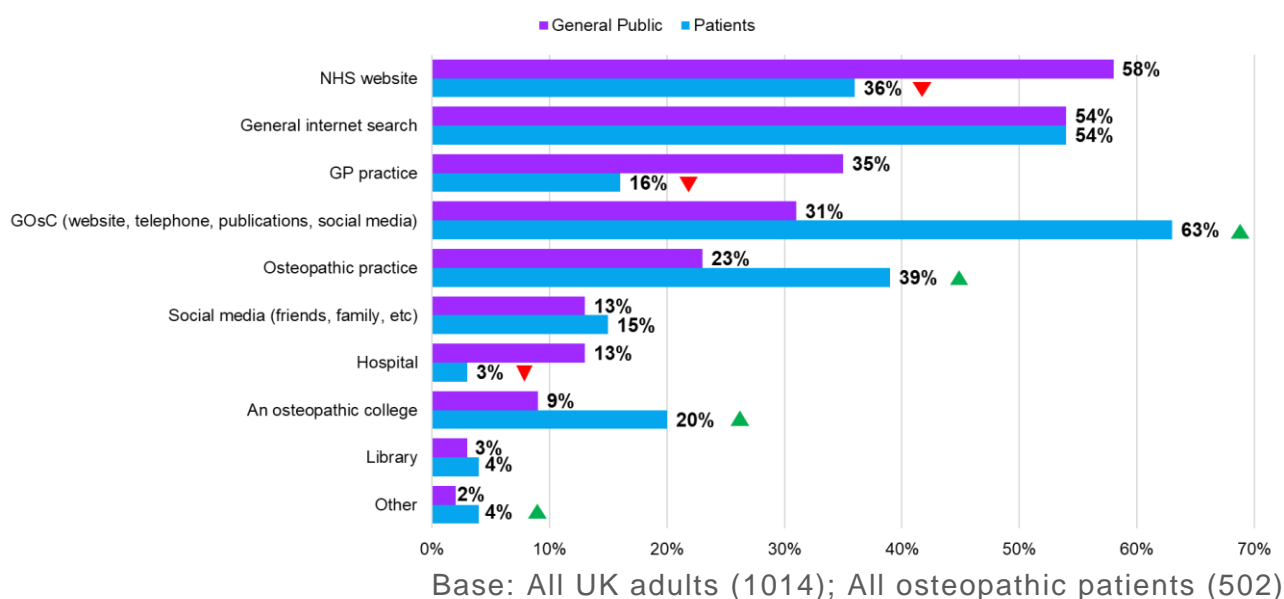
When looking for information about standards that osteopaths and osteopathic practices need to follow, over half of the public go to the NHS website (58%) or use a general internet search (54%), followed by about one-third who go to their GP practice (35%) or General Osteopathic Council website (31%).

While the same proportion of osteopathic patients use a general internet search (54%) as the public, the General Osteopathic Council (GOsC) website is the most common source for patients to look for information on standards (63%). Patients are more likely than the public to search from sources within the osteopathic space (the GOsC website 63% vs 31%, osteopathic practice 39% vs 23%, osteopathic college 20% vs 9%), whereas the public are more likely to search in more general medical spaces (NHS website 58% vs 36%, GP practice 35% vs 16%, hospital 13% vs 3%).

Young people (18-24s) are the least likely of any age group to look to the GOsC for this information (11% vs 47% 65+), and women are more likely than men to use either GOsC (35% vs 27%) or an osteopathic practice (26% vs 20%). Additionally, people with any disabilities are more likely than people without them to use the NHS website (63% vs 56%).

Since 2014, more of the public are turning to the practices where osteopaths work (19% 2014 vs 23% 2023) and the NHS website (42% 2014 vs 58% 2023) for this information. There does not appear to be any one demographic group that is clearly driving the trend towards more use of the NHS website, however older people appear to be driving the increase in use of osteopathic practice. In 2018, 26% of people age 65+ reported using an osteopathic practice (vs 21% of 18-24s), compared to 34% in 2023 (vs 16% of 18-24s). In 2018, 65+ people were only more likely than 18-24s, but by 2023, they are more likely than every other age group to use osteopathic practices to find this information.

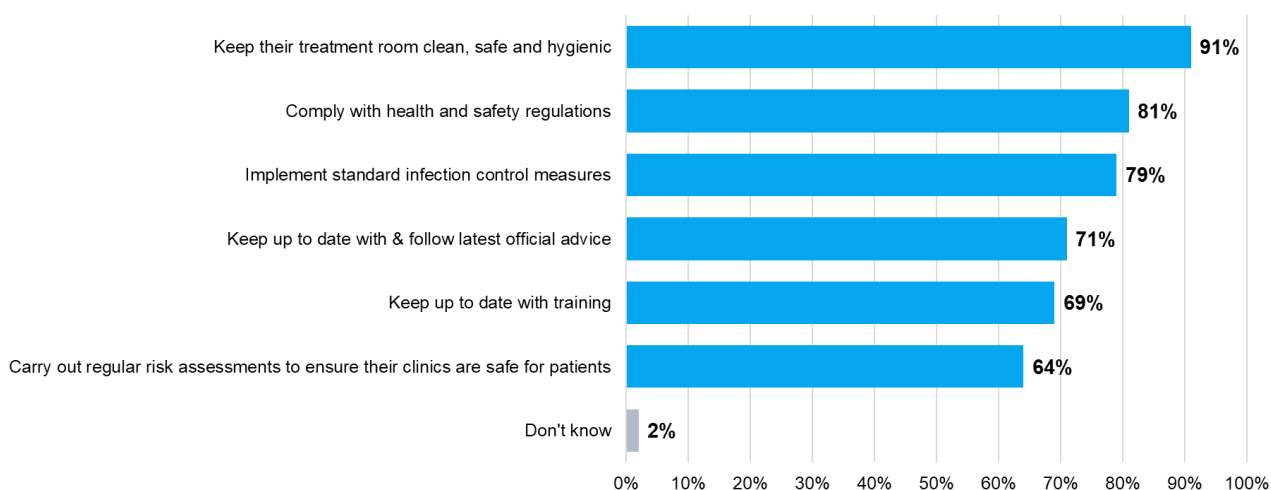
Figure 16. Sources used to look for information on standards of osteopaths/osteopathic practices



Q: Which of the following sources, if any, would you use if looking for information about standards of osteopathic practice which osteopaths need to follow?

As this was the first wave where data was collected after the COVID-19 pandemic, a new question was included to examine what osteopathic patients believe osteopaths should do to keep their patients safe. While a large majority think all options provided should be taken, keeping the treatment room clean, safe and hygienic is the most important to the public, with nine in 10 (91%) selecting this option. This is followed by complying with health and safety regulations (81%) and implementing standard infection control measures (79%). This remained consistent across all demographic groups.

Figure 17. Actions osteopaths should take to keep their patients safe from infection



Base: All osteopathic patients (502)

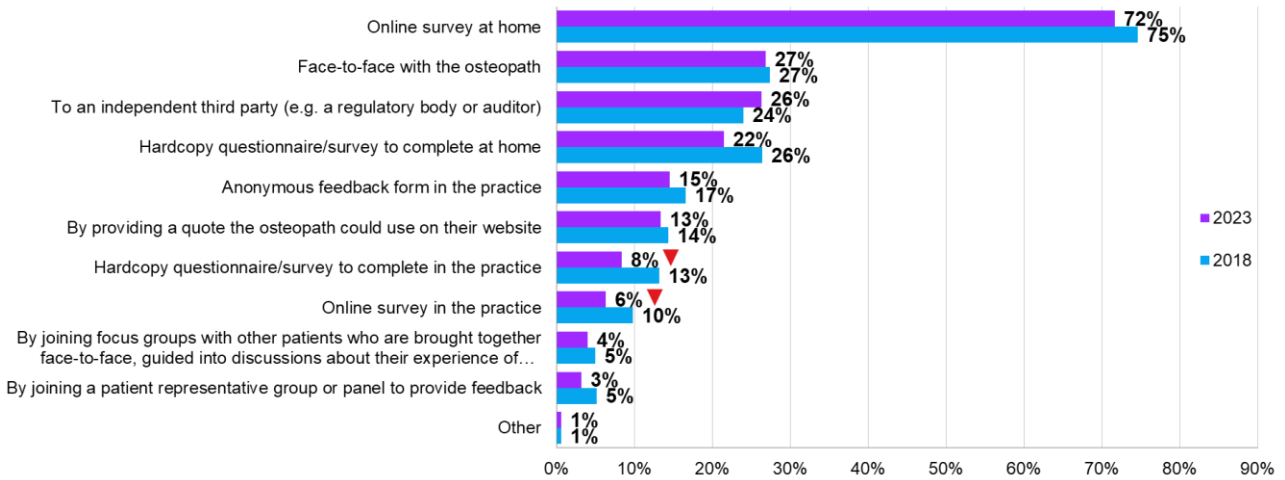
Q: Which, if any, of the following do you think osteopaths should do to help keep their patients safe from infection?

Providing feedback and reporting concerns

Just under three-quarters of osteopathy patients prefer giving feedback through an online survey at home (72%), which is broadly consistent with 2018 (75%). There has been a fall in the proportion saying they would want to complete a survey in the practice, whether hardcopy (8% vs 13% 2018) or online (6% vs 10% 2018).

Preference to provide hardcopy feedback in the practice has particularly dropped among women (7% 2023, 15% 2018) and those from higher social grades (8% 2023, 14% 2018). In 2023, men are more likely than women to prefer a hard copy survey they can complete at home (26% 2023 vs 19% 2018), but there are minimal differences across demographics beyond this.

Figure 18. Preferred ways of giving feedback



Base: All osteopathy patients (502)

Q: If you wanted or were asked to give feedback on your experience as a patient, in which of the following ways would you most prefer to do so?

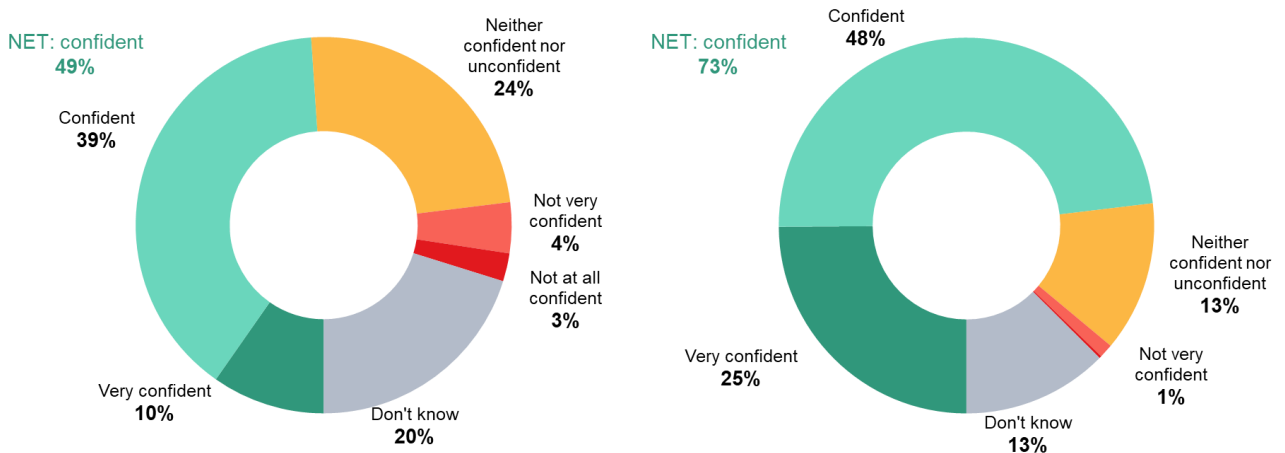
If they were to raise a concern, half of UK adults are confident that it would be properly investigated and addressed (49%) and this rises to almost three-quarters of osteopathy patients (73%). The lower confidence amongst all UK adults is primarily due to higher levels of uncertainty – only 7% are not confident concerns about an osteopath would be addressed.

However, confidence among *all* UK adults does appear to have fallen over time – in 2014, three-fifths thought a concern would be properly investigated (58%), over half in 2018 (53%), and now half (49%). The fall has been driven by younger adults – in 2018, over half of 18-24 year olds were confident a concern would be addressed (54%) and this has fallen to two-fifths (38%). Confidence among patients has not changed over time.

Figure 19. Levels of confidence a concern about an osteopath would be properly investigated/ addressed

UK adults

Osteopathy patients



Base: All UK adults (1014); All osteopathic patients (502)

Q: How confident or unconfident would you be that, if you raised a concern about an osteopath with the profession's regulator, they would be properly investigated and addressed?

Conclusions

Overall, there is a fair amount of confidence in osteopathy amongst the UK public; around half have confidence in the advice/ treatment received from the profession. Although overall confidence looks to have fallen since 2014, the decline is driven by those with weaker sentiments – that is those who say they have a ‘fair’ amount of confidence. Those who are very confident in osteopathy remain so throughout all waves. Similarly, patients are much more confident in osteopathy than the general public, suggesting that the low confidence reported is due to a lack of familiarity and understanding.

The importance of regulation in instilling trust among the general public has seen a similar decline over the past eight years. However, patients are more cognisant of the benefits of regulation, with increasing numbers saying information about regulation is important when visiting an osteopath. Similarly, while the general public’s confidence that a complaint would be upheld by a regulator has fallen slightly, patient sentiments have not changed over time – they trust that the General Osteopathic Council (GOsC) would properly investigate and address any concerns.

Despite this, awareness across the general public that osteopathy is a regulated profession has not changed and increasing numbers are aware of various rules osteopaths must follow, including registration with the GOsC. However, the public get their understanding of osteopathy and its standards from generalist sources such as broad internet searches or the NHS website while patients look specifically at osteopathic sources. In particular, when deciding to see an osteopath or not, the general public value recommendations from trusted figures such as their GP, or friends/ family who have had treatment.

Positively, the vast majority of osteopathic patients reported good experiences as a result of their most recent visit. Almost all say their osteopath made them feel at ease or showed care and compassion. Among osteopathy patients, the osteopath’s communication skills are increasingly paramount – there have been marked rises in the proportion of patients who say that, in order for them to feel confident in their osteopath treating them, it is important they listen to what the patient has to say, treats them with dignity, and puts them at ease.



If they were considering seeing an osteopath, UK adults are more likely than patients to prioritise information about costs and recommendations from third parties (e.g. other healthcare professionals, charities). Nine in 10 UK adults say the quality of advice/ treatment, the level of education/ training, or a requirement to keep skills/ knowledge up-to-date specifically drive confidence in a healthcare profession. These findings indicate that there is a lack of awareness and understanding among the wider public about osteopathy.

Appendix: Making complaints and raising concerns

In 2023, two parallel questions were asked regarding patient's confidence in either making a complaint or raising a concern as a result of dissatisfaction with their quality of care. Osteopathic patients were randomly allocated to one question. The aim of this approach was to identify how patients might respond to a difference in language relating to the process for making a complaint/ raising a concern, to support good communication on this subject.

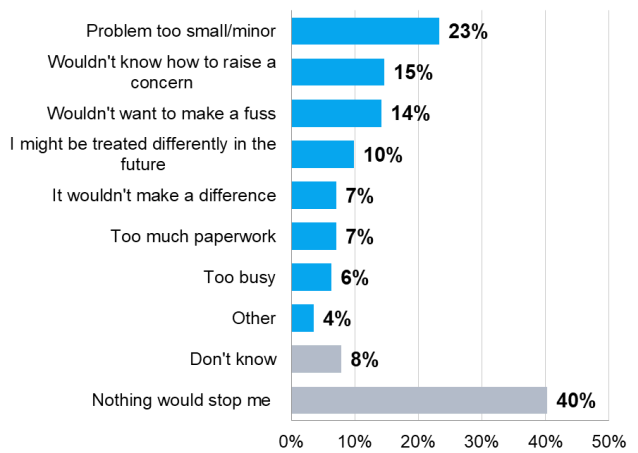
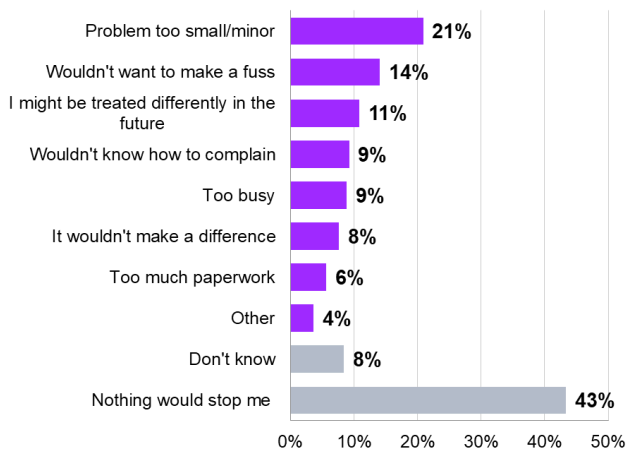
Broadly, there is little difference – two-fifths of osteopathic patients say nothing would stop them from making a complaint (43%) or raising a concern (40%). The largest barrier would be the problem being too insignificant – a fifth cite this as a barrier to making a complaint (21%) or concern (23%). However, one in 10 cite not knowing how to complain as a barrier (9%), rising to one in seven of those raising a concern (15%).

Men are more likely than women to say they would not know how to make a complaint (14% vs 6%), but there is no gender variation for not knowing how to raise a concern (14% vs 15%). Men are also more likely to say raising a concern makes no difference (12% vs 4% women), where there is no gender difference in making a complaint (6% vs 9%).

Figure 20. Barriers to making a complaint/ raising a concern

Making a complaint

Raising a concern



Base: All osteopathy patients (complaint= 249; concern= 253)

Q: If you visited an osteopath and were dissatisfied with the quality of care you received, what, if anything, would stop you from [making a complaint/ raising a concern]?