



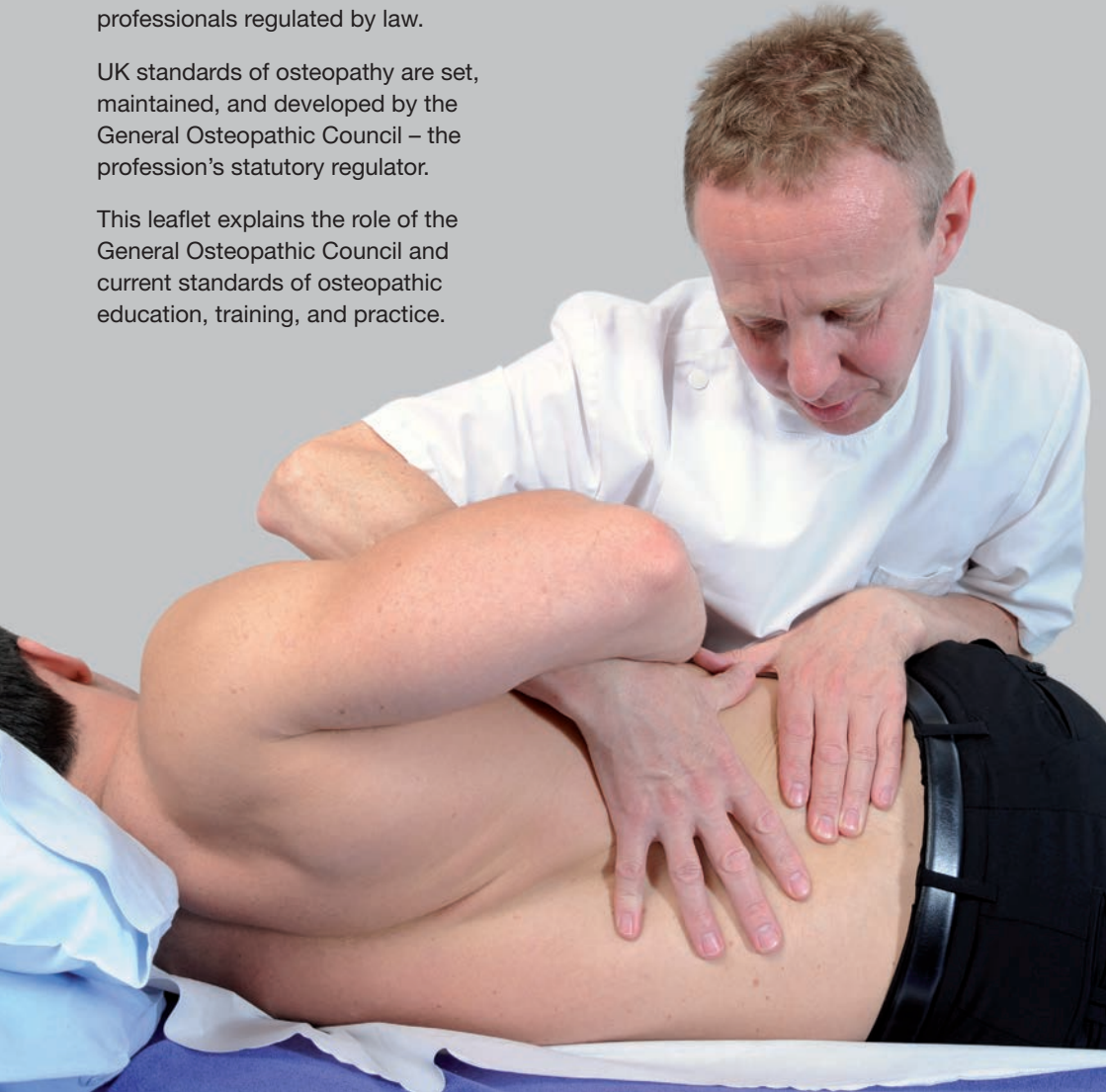
General
Osteopathic
Council

Standards of osteopathic care

Osteopaths are primary healthcare professionals regulated by law.

UK standards of osteopathy are set, maintained, and developed by the General Osteopathic Council – the profession's statutory regulator.

This leaflet explains the role of the General Osteopathic Council and current standards of osteopathic education, training, and practice.





REGISTERING QUALIFIED OSTEOPATHS

The General Osteopathic Council (GOsC) maintains the Register of those trained and qualified to practise osteopathy in the United Kingdom. To maintain their registration, osteopaths are required to renew their licence to practise annually. As part of this process, the GOsC checks that they have current professional indemnity insurance, remain in good health and of good character, and have met mandatory continuing professional development requirements.

The title 'osteopath' is protected by law, and only those on the UK statutory Register are entitled to call themselves osteopaths. We take legal action against individuals practising unlawfully, where we have sufficient evidence to support a criminal prosecution.

SETTING STANDARDS

It is the role of the GOsC to set and regularly review the standards of practice and conduct expected of osteopaths. These standards are currently outlined in our *Osteopathic Practice Standards*¹ document. Failure to comply with these standards may result in proceedings being brought against an osteopath.

TRAINING AS AN OSTEOPATH

Today, most osteopathic training is undertaken at degree level. Osteopathic students now follow a four or five-year degree course, combining academic and clinical, 'hands-on', work. Qualifications generally take the form of a diploma, bachelor's degree or master's degree in osteopathy, for example DO, BSc(Hons), BOST, BOSTMed or MOst.

A qualification in osteopathy includes anatomy, physiology, pathology, pharmacology, nutrition, and biomechanics, as well as at least 1,000 hours of clinical training experience with patients.

ASSURING QUALITY EDUCATION

The GOsC scrutinises the quality of all UK osteopathy courses leading to registration, to ensure that education providers are equipping students to practise safely and competently as osteopaths.

¹ *Osteopathic Practice Standards*. General Osteopathic Council, 2012.



In order to register to practise osteopathy in the UK, students must graduate with a qualification that is recognised by the GOsC. There are currently 11 institutions delivering GOsC-accredited osteopathic qualifications, which are also monitored by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.²

KEEPING KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS UP TO DATE

To renew their registration, osteopaths must provide the GOsC with confirmation that they have undertaken a minimum of 30 hours of continuing professional development (CPD) every year. We require osteopaths to undertake CPD activities that will maintain their skills and enhance their practice of osteopathy. CPD could be in the form of training courses, lectures, practice meetings or research activity, for example.

In line with Government requirements for all regulated health professions, we are developing a revalidation scheme, aimed at ensuring that osteopaths can regularly demonstrate that they remain fit to practise and meet current standards of competence, clinical practice, communication and professionalism.

² www.qaa.ac.uk.

OSTEOPATHY IN THE COMMUNITY

People seek osteopathic care for a wide variety of complaints, including back pain, postural problems in the growing child and arthritic pain in the elderly.

Most people visit an osteopath as a private patient and pay for their treatment, and major private health insurance policies provide cover for osteopathic treatment.

NHS, publicly-funded, osteopathic services are gradually becoming more widespread across the UK, allowing wider access for patients who cannot fund their own treatment. Aspects of osteopathic care, notably spinal manipulation, are also included in national and international clinical guidelines (NICE 2009³; European acute and low back pain guidelines, 2004⁴).

WITH OR WITHOUT REFERRAL?

Most patients refer themselves directly to an osteopath. Although referral by a GP is not necessary, patients are encouraged to keep their GP fully informed so that medical records are up to date.

Osteopaths are skilled in diagnostic techniques and trained to identify when a patient needs to be referred on to another healthcare professional. Similarly, GPs refer patients to osteopaths where they believe this intervention would be beneficial. This integrated approach is increasingly common, and reinforces osteopathy's position as a central part of a modern healthcare system.

EVIDENCE IN PRACTICE

To strengthen the evidence base for osteopathy, the GOsC supports the work of the National Council for Osteopathic Research (NCOR)⁵, whose role is to promote research relating to osteopathic care and to share the results. We have recently researched patient expectations of osteopathic care, and the risk of side effects or harm, and published this information on our website. We found that the majority of patients seeking osteopathic care were satisfied with their treatment, and serious side-effects are extremely rare, but we continue to investigate ways to increase the safety and quality of osteopathic patient care.

3 Low back pain: early management of persistent non-specific low back pain. National Collaborating Centre for Primary Care, May 2009.

4 European guidelines for the management of acute nonspecific low back pain in primary care, 2004.

5 www.ncor.org.uk



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DEALING WITH CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS

Public protection is the core of the General Osteopathic Council's role. We are committed to operating a fair process, through which patients, other health professionals, and the public can raise concerns about an osteopath and make a formal complaint. Once we have investigated a complaint about an osteopath, if the situation is serious enough, we can impose conditions on an individual's practice or even remove their right to practise.

FINDING AN OSTEOPATH

The UK statutory Register provides detailed information about osteopaths. This resource is freely available to the public via our website www.osteopathy.org.uk or our telephone information service on 020 7357 6655.

FURTHER INFORMATION

If you have questions or concerns about any aspect of osteopathic care, please contact the General Osteopathic Council at the address above.



www.osteopathy.org.uk

Scan for instant access
to the GOsC website