

***Battling the Sceptics:  
a collaboration with the  
UK Advertising Standards Authority***

OIA Convention 2016

Anaheim

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# The iO Mission

*‘To **unite, promote, develop and support** the osteopathic profession, for the improvement of UK health and patient care’*

# Background

- Sceptics are a constant background noise
- One particularly persistent group
  - Headed by journalist/author Simon Singh
  - and professor of complementary medicine Edzard Ernst
  - Stated determination to ban cranial and paediatric osteopathy
- British Chiropractic Assn (BCA) took Singh to court for libel
  - Lost at cost of £5 million
- 'Good Thinking Society' (GTS) formed 2012 – by Singh

# Osteopathic communications

- Written communications standards in UK are regulated by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) and its enforcement arm, the Committee on Advertising Practice (CAP)
- ASA guidance on permitted claims by osteopaths based on an approved list of conditions *for which osteopathic effectiveness has been proven*
- Bronfort review (2010) on *Effectiveness of manual therapies: the UK evidence* out of date
- ASA reliance on *Randomised Control Trial (RCT)* data
- GOsC has duty to take into consideration ASA rulings

# ASA: The List

- generalised aches and pains
- joint pains including hip and knee pain from osteoarthritis as an adjunct to core OA treatments and exercise
- general, acute & chronic backache, back pain (not arising from injury or accident)
- uncomplicated mechanical neck pain (as opposed to neck pain following injury i.e. whiplash)
- headache arising from the neck (cervicogenic) / migraine prevention
- frozen shoulder/ shoulder and elbow pain/ tennis elbow (lateral epicondylitis) arising from associated musculoskeletal conditions of the back and neck, but not isolated occurrences
- arthritic pain
- circulatory problems, cramp
- digestion problems
- joint pains
- lumbago
- sciatica
- muscle spasms
- neuralgia
- fibromyalgia
- inability to relax
- rheumatic pain
- minor sports injuries and tensions

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TW8kLdYLofc>

# New sceptic campaign

- Starts June 2015
  - Taped telephone conversation with clinic staff
  - Posted on YouTube
- 3 initial complaints raised with General Osteopathic Council (GOsC)
  - ‘*contravening ASA guidelines*’ = ‘*professional misconduct*’
- Escalates to 30 cases per month – over 300 raised

# ASA/CAP redlining

- small scale study findings
- patient groups: pregnant women, children and babies
- cranial osteopathy
- points of information:
  - describing the effects of birth on mother and baby
  - Joint pain (yes): foot and ankle pain, hand and elbow pain (no)
- philosophy or approach

# Regulators' different responses

- GOsC agrees approach with ASA
  - GTS complaints dealt with by GOsC
  - Advertising compliance provided by ASA/CAP
- BCA pushes all cases through to ASA
- Society of Homeopaths changes their rules so that ASA rulings are not enforced

# Turning the tables

- Sheer volume of GTS complaints has opposite effect to GTS intention
- ASA persuaded by GOsC that they need to work with the profession to resolve communications issues
- ASA agrees to meet with GOsC and iO

# The underlying issues

- ASA/CAP advice confused and inconsistent
  - lack of understanding that osteopathy is a complex intervention, osteopaths are trained primary care ‘first contact’
  - therefore ‘is it on The List?’ is not a practical policy
- ASA/CAP reliance on RCTs not consistent with current thinking
- ASA agrees to work with iO to review guidelines

# Our target goals

We accept that osteopaths should not claim effectiveness for treating conditions for which we do not yet have substantive evidence and..

- 1) *Osteopaths should be free to communicate factual information – even mentioning conditions not on The List – if we are careful not to imply effectiveness*
- 2) *The threshold of acceptable evidence – RCTs – needs to be modified*
- 3) *Research since 2010 should be used to add to The List*

# Mobilising the profession

- GOsC and iO reinforce current ASA guidelines
- iO members and all other osteopaths encouraged to contribute to counter campaign
- NCOR, undergraduate and postgraduate/CPD schools contribute time and resources
- iO brings in specialist media law firm

# Eleven months on..

- ASA agrees that:
  - Cranial osteopathy is a part of osteopathy
  - Osteopaths are trained to treat all patient groups including pregnant women, children and babies
  - Osteopaths can refer to conditions for which medical intervention should be sought
  - They should review the threshold for evidence
  - They will add to The List as further evidence is provided

# Still pushing..

- Describing our approach to conditions not on The List
  - Treatment of symptoms around core condition
  - ‘Impressionistic’ claims
  - Use of small scale studies to support approach
- Developing the evidence for the changing of evidence thresholds
- Gathering new evidence to add to The List

# Learning points

- Sceptics cause more hot air than actual impact
  - They have no evidence that osteopathy causes harm
  - They will run out of steam at some point
- Advertising regulators are not going to make an exception for your profession
- Working together is critical

# Thank you for listening

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