

***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- Bronfort review (2010) on *Effectiveness of manual therapies: the UK evidence* out of date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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