

NCOR: developing the osteopathic evidence base
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When NCOR was founded in 2003, it was widely recognised that considerable resources were required to support research within the UK osteopathic profession. There was a clear need for more high quality and easily accessible information concerning osteopathic research not only to enhance best practice and patient safety, but also to support aspiring researchers and to assist the profession in responding to questions from patients, the media, health commissioners and the general public.

NCOR Research Development Officer Carol Fawkes and Research Administrator Shirly Mathias have since been developing such resources for the profession. A significant amount and diverse range of information is now available through NCOR and continues to grow. This task is on-going and will require regular updating as new publications emerge and as resources expand and reconfigure.

Parallel to the accumulation of research resources, NCOR has been undertaking a number of activities, as outlined below.

NCOR supports osteopaths in three key ways:

- ◆ providing information and support;
- ◆ allowing access to a database of relevant evidence; and
- ◆ identifying opportunities for research skills training.

Information and support can be sought from NCOR either by telephone or via the dedicated website – www.ncor.org.uk. Some of the resources currently available via the NCOR website include:

- ◆ **Research tutorials**
 - Introduction to searching the Internet
 - Useful websites when searching the internet
 - Further searching on the internet
 - Jargon in research
 - Outcome measures
 - Critical appraisal skills
 - Systematic reviews – a brief overview
 - Randomised controlled trials – an introduction
 - The research process
 - Ethics and osteopathic research
 - How to write a case report
 - Clinical governance for practising osteopaths
- ◆ **Research Governance Framework**

In order to outline best practice in osteopathic research, NCOR has developed a Research Governance Framework for Osteopathy. Key areas of this document include:

 - Responsibilities of individuals involved with the research process.

- Information concerning the manner in which data is gathered and the need for adequate protection of sensitive patient data to comply with current legislation.
- Advice on how to avoid misconduct in research and procedures for dealing with such activity.
- Sources of additional information which may be helpful to researchers with diverse levels of experience.
- Ethical issues and the considerations that must be taken into account when conducting research in an ethical manner.
- Key principles to be considered when conducting research of high quality.

This comprehensive guidance is also supported by *A short guide to the Research Governance Framework for practising osteopaths* offering an introduction to the concepts of research governance and ethics.

◆ **National network of osteopathic research hubs**

In order to encourage and facilitate widespread engagement in osteopathic, NCOR has been developing a national network of research hubs. Groups have so far been established across the country in Exeter, Bristol, Oxford, Leeds, Perth, Glasgow, Sussex (Haywards Heath), South Wales, London and in conjunction with the BBENSCH regional osteopathic society.

- Most of the hubs are involved in small research and audit projects of their choosing. A number of hubs have already completed studies and are now in the process of writing them up for publication. These projects are outlined below. Exeter – creating a consent form for osteopathic practice through consensus.
- Oxford – identifying the minimum requirements of case notes for osteopathic practice.
- Bristol – examining patient referral patterns by osteopaths.
- Haywards Heath – investigating the osteopathic management of patients during pregnancy.

Ongoing studies are described in the research hub section overleaf.

◆ **Conference information**

NCOR's inaugural national osteopathic research conference took place on Friday 1 February 2008 at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, London. A number of keynote speakers from the world of osteopathy and biomechanics featured on the diverse and stimulating programme. A series of free papers were also presented by osteopaths engaged in research as part of their ongoing PhD or post-doctoral studies. In order to allow osteopaths the opportunity to have

their say and shape future research priorities, a series of debates and a symposium were organised.

An in-depth report on the event will feature in a forthcoming issue of *The Osteopath* and some of the conference papers and poster presentations will shortly be published on the Event website – www.osteopathy08.co.uk. The *International Journal for Osteopathic Research* will also feature some of the keynote papers in coming issues.

Access to evidence

Fact sheets detailing evidence for different areas of the body and for different symptoms have been compiled and are available to all osteopaths. A database of osteopathic research providing information on studies listed in international databases such as PubMed, AMED and CINAHL is currently under development. This central resource will offer osteopaths convenient access to current research and will also include information not currently available on the Internet or that has not been published (e.g. undergraduate research/conference presentations).

Identification of opportunities for research skills training

Growing interest in research amongst the osteopathic profession has resulted in an increased interest in research training. NCOR is frequently contacted by members of the profession enquiring about research training at various levels. Consequently, a number of relevant training courses have been identified. These include:

- Conversion courses: to give the award of a BSc degree for osteopaths who have already been awarded their DO.
- MSc courses: in areas of osteopathic practice, research methods, legal aspects of healthcare, etc.
- Centres of interest in musculoskeletal medicine and primary care: PhD opportunities for osteopaths interested in pursuing research at Doctoral level.

Up-to-date information on short courses has also been identified for osteopaths who may not be able to commit to long-term study.

Other NCOR projects:

The NCOR Information Centre is contacted frequently by osteopaths, students of osteopathy, journalists, government agencies, other healthcare professionals and the general public seeking unbiased and sound evidence related to osteopathic practice and manual therapy.

Standardised data collection

One of NCOR's main projects is to develop a standardised data collection (SDC) tool for osteopaths. This will provide a relevant and useful mechanism for capturing data about osteopathy in the UK today and offers a systematic way for **all interested osteopaths to collect the same data about patients and practice** to provide information the profession urgently needs about itself. Information can be collected for short periods of time on a snapshot basis, looking at discrete topic areas in order to assist you with:

- ◆ profiling your patients
- ◆ profiling your practice

- ◆ designing your own audits
- ◆ compiling service delivery information for inform insurers, healthcare commissioners and Primary Care Trusts etc
- ◆ developing research questions
- ◆ improving patient safety and enhancing wider understanding of adverse reactions, informed consent and clinical governance.

Adverse events proposals

Evidence concerning the frequency of adverse events associated with osteopathic treatment is currently limited and to date the profession has had to rely on contributions from the chiropractic and physiotherapy professions. To address this deficit, the General Osteopathic Council last year agreed to fund four research projects investigating adverse events. The process of developing the call for proposals, selection of successful proposals and monitoring of work is being undertaken by a sub-committee of NCOR. The four areas of investigation are:

Project 1: Adverse events associated with physical interventions in osteopathy and relevant manual therapies.

Project 2: Communicating risk and obtaining consent in osteopathic practice.

Project 3: Insurance claim trends and patient complaints to the profession's regulator.

Project 4: Investigating osteopaths' attitudes to managing and assessing risk in clinical settings, and patients' experiences and responses to osteopathic treatment.

Press responses

Publication of articles in peer-reviewed journals has in recent years seen an increased amount of press coverage concerning osteopathy and other similar professions, which, unfortunately, is not always accurate or positive. NCOR has subsequently published responses to articles in *The Times*, *Galloway Gazette*, *Peak Performance*, *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* and *The Lancet*, in an attempt to clarify certain points and improve understanding of osteopathic practice

Journalists preparing occasional pieces featuring osteopathy also frequently consult the NCOR office for information.

Supporting other organisations

In order to enhance understanding of osteopathy and its role in primary care, and to improve patient care, NCOR representatives also support other organisations affiliated with the osteopathic profession and public health. These organisations include the National Electronic Library for Health (NeLCAM: www.library.nhs.uk/cam), the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE: www.nice.org.uk) and the European Federation of Osteopaths (research division) www.e-f-o.org, amongst others.

Communication

NCOR publishes articles in each issue of *The Osteopath* magazine. These articles focus on research methods, research activities in the network of NCOR hubs and

short summaries of current evidence relating to clinical practice.

Experienced researchers' group

The number of osteopathic researchers in the United Kingdom is steadily increasing. More osteopaths are undertaking postgraduate training at Masters and PhD level, NCOR has created a research forum, providing a source of expertise, mentoring and advice. Currently, this group meets twice a year.

Heads of Osteopathic Research group

The research leads from each of the osteopathic educational institutions (OEs) attend the bi-monthly NCOR meetings. This group of experienced researchers also meets as a separate committee in an attempt to identify and develop collaborative research projects, utilising and sharing research supervisor's particular areas of expertise. Representatives of the group also participate regularly in research workshops.

When NCOR was originally created, it developed a five-year strategic plan; nearly all of the activities identified in the plan have been fulfilled. NCOR's work continues as new resources are identified in response to the needs of the profession, staff in the OEs and osteopaths currently in training.