



Osteopathy Council of New South Wales

Level 6 North Wing 477 Pitt Street Sydney NSW 2000

Locked Bag 20 Haymarket NSW 1238

Phone: 1300 197 177 Fax: (02) 9281 2030

Email: mail@osteopathycouncil.nsw.gov.au

Online: www.osteopathycouncil.nsw.gov.au

15 February 2013
Reference: HP13/876

Dr Cathy Woodward
Executive Officer
Osteopathy Board of Australia

Dear Dr Woodward,

Re: *Draft Guidelines for Sexual and Professional Boundaries*

The Osteopathy Council of New South Wales (OC NSW) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the OBA's proposed draft guidelines. However the OC NSW feels that, in their current form, the draft guidelines offer insufficient guidance to the practitioner or protection for the public.

The OC NSW notes that the issue of sexual and professional boundaries is quite a different issue to the issue of treatment of sensitive areas and internal examination and treatment. These guidelines appear confusing due to the lack of separation regarding these two issues. We note that internal techniques (vaginal and rectal) and treatment of sensitive areas have given rise to a disproportionately high number of patient complaints against osteopaths practising in New South Wales, considering the fact that the utilisation of said techniques is relatively uncommon.

We note that the absence of specific guidelines in regard to treatment of sensitive areas and internal techniques may subject legitimate treatment to question and as well, facilitate inappropriate conduct by osteopaths under the guise of valid treatment. Given the level of distress that failure to properly discuss options, offer clinical justification or obtain informed consent for these techniques may cause patients as well as practitioners, the OC NSW feels that the draft guidelines as they are currently proposed fail to adequately protect the public. The lack of clear guidance on treating sensitive areas may lead to patient confusion even when the practitioner has legitimate intentions.

In an effort to at least in part clarify the matter, the OC NSW suggests that where an osteopath is proposing the use of internal techniques or to treat sensitive areas, it would be appropriate to issue guidance along these lines:

- The rationale for, and nature of, the technique(s) being recommended are discussed with the patient, but not used on the day. Instead the technique is offered as an option for a subsequent consultation, so allowing the patient time to consider all the treatment options available, and to discuss the matter with family, friends and/or other health care providers.

- That the patient is made aware by the osteopath that they have the right to bring a support person or the use of a chaperone, and indeed is encouraged to do so.
- That for internal techniques, gloves are always to be used, draping utilised and the patient's modesty and dignity maintained.
- That in all cases, the osteopath should obtain signed, informed consent.