Creating your community of practice

The way we feel about our connections to others can make a huge difference to how we feel about ourselves. As we enter a lifestyle where distancing is a (temporary) societal norm, Glynis Fox, iO Council Member, argues that using community practice to connect with each other will be what lifts and drives the profession through.

An interesting fact: most osteopaths work alone. Even if there are other practitioners in the same practice, or area, we may not have regular contact with them. I find that I can work alongside a colleague and have hardly any time with them during the day unless we book in a space to talk. Every day, we are working one to one with our patients with our only feedback coming from them. Many osteopaths don’t take time out to spend one to one or group time with colleagues. This can put a great deal of pressure on the individual practitioners. Feeling connected to others can alleviate this sense of isolation. I would like to argue that practicing alone without adequate support structures should change and the quicker the better.

Did you know?
70% of osteopaths are happy to help colleagues but a large number feel isolated. Why is this? The problem here seems to be one of fear. Fear of seeming needy, fear of appearing vulnerable, perhaps fear of taking the first step toward a colleague and being rejected.

What does community practice mean?
A sense of connection with others. It is the source of friendships, advice, help, both personal and professional. It also develops a method of referring patients to other osteopaths whom you trust.

How do we take part in community practice?
Regional societies enhance our experience of practice life. There is a strong community of osteopaths in Scotland with an active regional society which predated GOsC and the formalisation of CPD.

I have been a member of the Scottish Osteopathic Society (SOS), a regional CPD group that offers its members a sense of community, since graduating, and regularly attend the high quality CPD courses that are organised. This works both to improve/refresh my knowledge and skill base, but also to form and maintain relationships with the wider osteopathic community in Scotland.

On a practical level, working as part of a community means that we all benefit from the group experience. Making the transition from student, to graduate, to established osteopath can be difficult, and as the years pass by it is all too easy to forget just how challenging it was. In addition, we tend to work in quite an isolated setting that has the potential to leave one feeling very alone. Working as a larger group could be an important part of a new graduates’ development and an established practitioners’ support network.

The scope of community working is huge. You offer what you feel happy to offer and this doesn’t have to be the same for any two people. It is not just about sharing good osteopathic practice and discussing difficult patient cases, it is about sharing general knowledge, life experience, and business support/tools, such as marketing and financial planning, as well as personal support. The possibilities are endless.

What would the ideal osteo community be for you?
Our profession can grow a great deal by supporting colleagues, especially less experienced practitioners. Perhaps you have a skill which you can share? A technique you are good at or a way of communicating on social media or in person? Making a change to the profession can happen, and these small collaborative steps will lead to great things. For those of you who are thinking about taking that step to make contact with other practitioners, I hope I’ve encouraged you to take the next step. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

Turn to page 41 to read Glynis’s tips for practising during lock down.

Glynis Fox

Glynis graduated from the UCO (formally BSO) in 1997. She has been in private practice since graduating. She worked in London after graduating, working in Fulham with Melinda Cotton in The Fulham Osteopathic Practice. She is currently Principal Osteopath in a central Edinburgh practice and has been a coach for her junior colleagues in her practice for over ten years. She is an active member of local, regional and national osteopathic organisations. Glynis was elected to the iO Council in 2019.