

Impact of osteopathy on carers

A case study

In 2019, Core Clapton offered twenty-two carers living within Hackney, London, up to six osteopathic treatment sessions free of charge. The aim of this study was to evaluate whether osteopathic treatment would improve the overall quality of life, and mental and physical wellbeing, of carers in the local area.

Article Summary:

- Understanding the problem
- Aim and objectives
- Service description
- Method and approach
- Results and evaluation
- Participant stories
- Key learning points
- CPD discussion exercise

Understanding the problem

The total number of unpaid carers within the UK has been estimated to be around 8.8 million adults, and it is thought that 3 in 5 people will be carers at some point in their lives¹. This is expected to increase as the older population grows.

Furthermore, according to results from the 2011 Census, people providing unpaid care tend to have more health issues than non-carers². Carers who are in an older age band are over two times more likely to live with 'poor health' compared to those who are not carers³. Almost half of carers do not receive an annual health check and over half of carers have communicated that their GP "left a health problem go untreated and their mental health got worse" (Carers UK, 2019).

From a social and emotional standpoint, 83% of carers within the UK have reported feeling "lonely and socially isolated" due to being a carer⁴. Finally, six out of ten of carers in the UK have stated that financial stress was affecting their health⁵.

In addition, there are an estimated 18,000 unpaid carers who live within the Hackney area, and three out of four of them have felt that their role as carers has been misunderstood or devalued by the community⁷. It is important that carers receive optimal care and support and that the medical community makes carers feel less isolated and more understood and cared for⁸.

The social aspect of the biopsychosocial model is one of the most understudied dimensions of this model of care⁹. Social context and connectivity are a vital part of feeling well and valued.

Aims and objectives

To determine whether osteopathic treatment would improve the overall quality of life, and mental and physical wellbeing, of adult carers with hip and knee pain in the Borough of Hackney.

In addition, the secondary hypothesis was whether gender, number of treatment sessions and practitioner affected the questionnaire scores.

The recent switch in pain management to a truly biopsychosocial phenomena¹⁰, and the consideration that studies have found that osteopathic treatment improves quality of life in a mental and physical manner for those in pain¹⁰, led to the development of this study. Healthcare providers have historically given diagnosis and treatment a priority, when often patients prioritise communication and



Participants for this project were carers, over 40 years of age, who presented with musculoskeletal hip and knee pain of over three months' duration. Osteopathic treatment was left to the practitioner's discretion and included joint mobilisation, articulation, manipulation, soft tissue techniques, pain education and exercise advice.

understanding¹¹. This study aimed to combine the two in order to provide optimal treatment for carers.

Service description

Core Clapton is a charity set up with the aim of providing mentoring to new graduates while researching the effects of osteopathy on quality of life. The centre offers treatment on a tiered payment model, helping people suffering from chronic pain of all incomes get affordable osteopathic care.

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Exercise and general wellbeing are heavily promoted at Core to encourage an active lifestyle



CLINICAL DEVELOPMENT



Kate Nunn

After graduating from the UCO in 2018, Kate volunteered at Core Clapton for a year alongside working for a local clinic close to home in West Sussex. Core was invaluable to her as a new graduate, providing a space for ongoing learning and discussion with support from a mentor and other associates, and the opportunity to treat a diverse range of patients from both a cultural and socio-economic perspective.



Monica Abrosimoff

Monica completed a Masters of Osteopathy at the ESO in 2018. Post-graduation she participated in the mentorship program at CORE - a helpful way of making the transition between student to professional. She currently works as an outpatient physical therapist at a private hospital in the southeast of England. Her dissertation, a qualitative study investigating how osteopaths operationalise the BPS model with patients with low back pain was published in *IJOM* last year..



Gabriel Antoni Pineda

Gabriel graduated with Distinction from the University College of Osteopathy. He grew up in a multi-cultural household in Barcelona and has a particular interest in arthritis, geriatric care and pain management.

Gabriel published his Master's degree thesis 'A comparison of the variability of osteopaths' sustained altimeter guided pressure: A cross-sectional study' in the *Bone and Joint Orthopaedic Proceedings*. "Being able to undertake research like this at Core has really helped me evolve as a practitioner."



Daniel Orchard

Daniel Orchard (BOst., MSc) is an active promoter of osteopathy both within the profession and to the general public. Daniel directs the Centre for Osteopathic Research and Excellence (CORE Clapton). As an academic, Daniel lectures in pain science, writes the pain curriculum for the University College of Osteopathy, and reviews articles in pain science journals. In addition, Daniel is an active member of osteopathic committees, including the Osteopathic Alliance and the iO Council.

This article contains signposts to sources of further information, and the opportunity to prepare and discuss patient case studies with multidisciplinary practitioners in order to gain clinical support and better outcomes for patients.

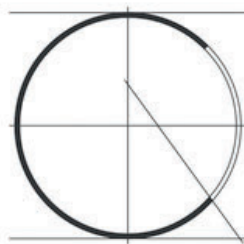
After reading, share your understanding with a colleague by answering the questions in the CPD discussion exercise at the end of the article. Once you have completed your CPD, you can use the link below to download and complete a reflective practice form in line with Osteopathic Practice Standards B2 (1.11) and B4 and add to your CPD file: [iOsteopathy.org/making-themostof-your-cpd](https://www.iosteopathy.org/making-themostof-your-cpd)

CPD relevant to the following Osteopathic Practice Standards*

- A** Communications and patient partnership A3
- B** Knowledge, skills and performance B1, B2, B3, B4
- C** Safety and quality in practice C1
- D** Professionalism D10

* Always remember your limitations and stay within your scope of practice when offering advice

i To read this article in full, including references visit [iOsteopathy.org/CPD-articles](https://www.iosteopathy.org/CPD-articles)



core clapton

Method and approach

Participants were recruited via a newsletter sent out by Hackney Carers Centre, and the first twenty-two carers to respond were offered treatment. Consent was sought from the outset to share the results of the study in an anonymised form. The carers were offered six consecutive treatments over the course of six months. The osteopathic appointments and treatments were categorised as pragmatic: the osteopathic clinicians determined the number of appointments and treatment that would best benefit the participant.

PROMs were collected in the form of the Musculoskeletal Health Questionnaire (MSK-HQ), the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS), pain numerical rating score (NRS), and Patient Specific Functional Scale (PSFS).

Results and evaluation

Analysis revealed both statistical and clinical improvement in all outcome measures except the WEMWBS. For the MSK-HQ, the average difference was 12 out of 56, twice minimal clinically important difference (MCID) of 5.51. NRS improved by an average of 2.8 out of 10 (MCID = 22). And PSFS improved by 3.8 out of 10 (MCID is 2.73). While there was a slight improvement in WEMWBS of 2.7 out of 70, this was not clinically significant (MCID is 3.4).

Participant stories

Stephen

Stephen, 60-years of age, was suffering from chronic bilateral knee pain that was making it increasingly difficult to work and care for his wife. Stephen

had tried other interventions, including physiotherapy, an arthroscopy, and a steroid injection, and had been informed of the need to undergo a knee replacement within a year. Following osteopathic treatment, Stephen experienced significant improvement in pain, function and overall wellbeing: "the pain has gone down to a manageable level - I can walk a lot better, I am sleeping a lot better... I can now walk for a lot longer; I can stand for a lot longer". Stephen was subsequently discharged by the orthopaedic consultant.

Brian

Brian, 85-years of age, sought treatment for his stooped posture and increased reliance on a walking stick. Following treatment he explained: "I was using a walking stick to go from one room to another, and I now find that sometimes I lose the walking stick and I can't remember which room I have left it in. Then I realise it's because I didn't need it in the first place.

Koray

Koray, aged forty-seven, approached Core for aid with a hamstring strain which occurred six months previously and was preventing him from remaining active through running. Koray had six treatments over twelve weeks, which were focused on rehabilitating the hamstring with a progressive program of eccentric loading and coaching to help recruit the muscles around the hip to support this recovery. By the end of the sixth session, Koray was back to running on the treadmill without pain; his neck pain had also greatly reduced, and he felt that he had gained the tools to manage his discomfort. When he was discharged, he stated, "I found the practitioner to be very understanding towards my condition and they showed the skills and the knowledge to support me in improving my well-being".

Key learning points

- Six sessions of osteopathy made a considerable difference to the lives of carers, who were often struggling with chronic MSK pain.
- A short course of osteopathy was effective across a range of MSK outcome measures but showed no clinically significant difference in mental well-being.

- Osteopathic intervention, using a biopsychosocial approach, could help reduce the burden on the NHS.
- Stories from the participants showed that osteopathy had given them greater self-efficacy and improved their quality of life in a way that was not appreciable from the statistical analysis.

Osteopaths' observations by Kate N & Monica A

"Being involved in the Carers project at Core was an opportunity to work with people of the local Hackney community that were otherwise unlikely to access osteopathic treatment. It was a privilege to meet these patients and to have the freedom to apply a truly biopsychosocial approach."

"Part of this freedom came from the absence of expectations that the patients had around osteopathic treatment. Many of them hadn't heard of osteopathy before and therefore did not expect to be 'cracked and fixed'. This made it easy to discuss the wider context influencing the patient's symptoms. Additionally, as carers, there was an appreciation of the multifactorial nature of health and their experiences opened the door for conversations about all the innumerable contributions and solutions that were available to improve quality of life and decrease symptoms. Finally, as there was no money changing hands and there was a limitation of six sessions, there was a reprieve for both the practitioner and the patient in creating or maintaining any commitment from a financial point of view."

"The experience was also not glamorous or shiny. There are challenges that come with working with disadvantaged members of society. I became acutely aware of my values, and, like any of us, how implicit I am in projecting them into the therapeutic space. The experience stretched my ability to be patient-centered in recognising and celebrating the valuable different cultural and societal norms and the diversity of human nature."

"Working on this project is one of the most rewarding experiences I have had. Where it really felt that we were making a difference was in the creation of a community and the ability



to bolster the social aspects of the lives in this group of patients who are otherwise often quite solitary. It is this application of the social sphere of the biopsychosocial model which felt very valuable in offering these people some guidance to manage their pain and distress."

Researcher reflection by Gabriel AP

Understanding the various learning curves involved with planning methodology and adequate data collection was extremely beneficial. We learned the value and importance of pre-planning to avoid data loss, as well as the importance of making sure things are managed well, with tight scheduling and project planning (often involving chasing up the various omissions in the data). This study elicited a lot of reflection, and will encourage and help us to succeed more in future studies.

Core's reflection by Daniel Orchard

As a new centre keen to undertake research and further the osteopathic profession, measuring outcomes is an essential part of our everyday activities. Similarly, as a charity, one of our main aims is to make osteopathy accessible to under-invested communities. Therefore, the Carers Project was invaluable in helping us to assess our own abilities to undertake research, but also a great way to reach out to potential service users who would not normally have access to osteopathy. It was a useful reflective tool for our practitioners to get them thinking about how they can best assist these patients with complex needs in a limited time frame. The results are really exciting for us, and give us a tool to reach out to other community groups and NHS practices, who deal with complex cases and may be struggling to find solutions. I would highly recommend other practices undertake similar research studies to help them gain insight into their effectiveness and processes, whilst simultaneously helping a patient group in need. Our next step is to replicate this with full

research ethics, and seek funding for a larger study.

The findings have been used in several grant applications to apply for further funding. They have also been used to report on the effectiveness of osteopathy when liaising with local GPs in Hackney.

References

For a full list of references mentioned in this article email and to read the original extended version of this case study visit iOsteopathy.org/CPD-articles

Expanding osteopathy's outreach

The study began because of discussions in the news about the hidden value of carers, both to society and to the NHS. We decided to run a small service evaluation to see what effect osteopathy might have on carers.

Offering this service for free made it easy to build relationships. We quickly found an active member of the City and Hackney Carers Centre willing to reach out to their members. Within a week, we had twenty-five participants that fitted our criteria.

The logistics of data-gathering proved more complex than we had envisaged, but it was great to see the osteopaths motivated to understand and treat complex cases (not just the 'worried well').

The study has resulted in visits from the Mayor, and ongoing work with local GPs and social prescribers, to create a referral pathway for their complex patients with chronic pain and unexplained visceral and somatic symptoms.

About Core Clapton

Core Clapton was set up with the dual aim of making osteopathy accessible to all, whilst researching person-centred treatments for chronic pain. The centre offers specialist treatment to individuals on a tiered payment model, helping people of all incomes suffering from chronic pain to get back to doing what they value and enjoy most. An integral part of this care is also to present options for self-management strategies, like affordable wellness classes to encourage a healthier and happier community. The vision of Core Clapton is to build an active community with the tools to cope with persistent pain, by addressing all aspects of health and wellness under a biopsychosocial framework.

Key contacts

The original study was undertaken by Daniel Orchard and Gabriel Antoni-Pineda who are contactable via Core Clapton coreclapton.org

CPD discussion exercise

You can discuss your knowledge with a colleague, perhaps over the phone or online using the below questions as prompts to share and display your understanding.

1. What has been the impact of osteopathy on the carers involved?
2. How does this study show the impact of osteopathy?
3. How can you use this case study to inform your own practice?
4. If relevant, in your own practice how can you reach out to your local carer community?