



Guidance on Advertising

This guidance must be read in conjunction with The Code (2016) prepared by the General Chiropractic Council (GCC), which sets out standards for conduct, performance and ethics for chiropractors to ensure the competent and safe practice of chiropractic.

This guidance is not intended to cover every situation that you may face. However, it does set out broad principles to enable you to think through and act professionally, ensuring patient interest and public protection at all times.

To note: The GCC will review this guidance as necessary and update it as appropriate, and reapply the principles of the Code to any critical changes or new situations that may emerge.

Standards within the Code with reference to advertising:

B3:

Use only legal and verifiable information when publicising yourself as a chiropractor, advertising your work and/or your practice including on your website. The information must be honest and comply with all advertising codes and standards.

Other Standards in the Code that reinforce and link to the above:

- A1 Show respect, compassion and care for your patients by listening to them and acknowledging their views and decisions. You must not put any pressure on a patient to accept your advice.
- B2 Ensure you, and any chiropractor who works with you on a contractual basis, are properly qualified, registered and insured.

Advertising your chiropractic services or practice is one form of alerting the public and patients to your existence and helping them make informed choices about their healthcare.

It is fundamental that the information you provide is legal, decent, honest and truthful. You must be able to fully substantiate any claims you make at the time they are made, this includes facts about yourself, the work you do, the results of your treatments and the services you provide.

The information you present must be published in a way that conforms to the law, the UK Code of Broadcast Advertising (BCAP code), the CAP Code and guidance issued by the Advertising Standards Authority, the UK's advertising regulator and Ofcom (please see essential links below).

The information you publish must not make unsubstantiated or false claims about the quality of your services. It must not, in any way, offer guarantees of cures, nor exploit patients' vulnerability or lack of clinical knowledge.

Advertising services:

For the purposes of this guidance, advertising includes both broadcast and non-broadcast media, and includes but is not limited to:

- (i) all forms of printed and electronic media;
- (ii) any public communication using television;
- (i) radio;
- (ii) newspapers and magazines;
- (iii) mobile communications;
- (iv) the Internet and websites;
- (v) directories;
- (vi) business cards; and
- (vii) office signs.

Advertising also includes situations in which chiropractors provide information for media reports or articles, including where chiropractors make comment or provide information on particular products or services. You are responsible for the content of any media article, statement or interview in which you are involved or which is attributed to you. Therefore it is advisable for you to ensure that you have seen its content before publication and/or broadcast so that you can ensure it does not breach the Code of Practice or the ASA guidance.

When considering what chiropractic services to offer and therefore advertise, these must only be services that you are qualified to offer, for which you have undertaken the necessary training and obtained the appropriate qualification to be regarded as competent in that skill.

Authorising the content of advertising

Chiropractors are responsible for the style and content of all advertising material associated with the provision of their goods and services. You are accountable and responsible for ensuring the accuracy of advertising and compliance

regardless of who writes the material (whether an administrator, manager, director, media or advertising agency or other unregistered person).

If you are an employed chiropractor you may not have direct control over the content of an advertisement. However, you should check and review the content of any advertising of your services and take reasonable steps, such as informing your employer, in writing if necessary, of any aspects that you consider of non-compliance.

Whenever you, your practice or any place where you work as a registrant produces any information linked to your name, you are personally responsible for checking that the information given is correct.

You must:

- (i) ensure information is current, accurate and updated if circumstances change;
- (ii) use clear language that patients are likely to understand;
- (iii) ensure that all claims can be substantiated or independently verified;
- (iv) avoid ambiguous statements; and
- (v) avoid statements or claims intended and/or likely to create an unjustified expectation about the results you can achieve.
- (vi) ensure costs of services are made clear.

It is also highly recommended that your GCC registration number is included with the information listed above.

All of this is important as it is all part of protecting the reputation of, and confidence in, the chiropractic profession as well as ensuring and justifying patient trust.

Websites

It is highly recommended that you ensure the website of your practice or the practice in which you work displays the following information:

- (i) the name and address at which the chiropractic service is located;
- (ii) contact details of the practice, including e-mail address and telephone number; and
- (iii) the date the website was last updated.

You must provide details of the practice's complaints procedure and information that enables patients to contact the GCC in the event of an unresolved complaint.

You should update the information on your website regularly so that it accurately reflects the personnel at the practice and the service offered.

Marketing websites

If you use marketing or social networking websites to promote your services, (e.g. Facebook and Groupon), you must make clear that any treatment advertised is conditional on a clinical assessment being carried out in accordance with the provisions of the Code and that the treatment may not be appropriate for every patient.

Any initial decision by a consumer in response to an advertised service does not imply informed consent and does not remove the obligation on you as a chiropractor to obtain informed consent in writing before proceeding to provide care. You must assess the patient, obtain appropriate consent (see our separate guidance on consent) and discuss the risks as well as the benefits of the options of care.

Use of qualifications and titles

You must not use any title or qualification in a way that may mislead the public as to its meaning or significance.

You must not mislead patients into believing that you are trained and competent to provide other services purely by virtue of your qualification as a healthcare professional.

If you refer to qualifications that you hold in addition to your original chiropractic qualification, you must not say or imply that they are recognised by the GCC as specialist qualifications.

If you use the title 'Doctor' in advertising, when talking to patients or in writing such as on business stationery or practice nameplates, you must make it clear that you are not a registered medical practitioner (you should refer to the CAP guidance and the GCC website for further information on this subject).

Suspension from the GCC Register

If you are suspended or removed from the GCC register, it is a criminal offence to say or imply that you are a chiropractor. If you are suspended from the GCC register, you will remain accountable to the GCC during your period of suspension and you are required to remove or amend any advertising material during the period of suspension or on removal from the GCC register.

Essential Reading:

- *UK Code of Non-broadcast Advertising, Sales Promotion and Direct Marketing, Edition 12*, www.cap.org.uk/Advertising-Codes/Non-Broadcast.aspx
- *UK Code of Broadcast Advertising (BCAP Code)*, www.cap.org.uk/Advertising-Codes/Broadcast.aspx

- *Hyperlinks to relevant legislation and important information*, GCC April 2015, www.gcc-uk.org/UserFiles/Docs/Legislation%20Relevant-Reference-Links-April15.pdf

Additional Information:

- *Advertising Standards Authority*, www.asa.org.uk/About-ASA/About-regulation.aspx
- *Principles of Ethical Advertising*, GDC March 2012, www.gdc-uk.org/Dentalprofessionals/Standards/Pages/Ethical-advertising.aspx
- *Ofcom (Independent regulator and competition authority for the UK communications industries)*, www.ofcom.org.uk