The Chiropractic Profession

Research on GCC registrants

December 2016
Introduction

Each year, the GCC publishes a Registration Report that summarises the make up of the chiropractic register. As well as identifying trends associated with movements on the number of chiropractors registering with us (or leaving the register), the Registrations Report also collects some limited demographic data on the profession.

However, beyond this rather limited data, we have little other information about the chiropractic profession in the UK. So, over summer 2016 we asked everyone on the register to complete an anonymous survey to give us an opportunity to learn a little more about them.

The survey followed an earlier one carried out on chiropractors who first joined the register in 2015. That survey – The Class of ’15 – gave us an important insight into new people joining the register and was used to test the questions for the survey of the entire profession.

630 people – one fifth of the profession – responded to the invitation to take part. To the 630 thank you. Your help is appreciated, and will help us to ensure that we reflect the current make up and way the profession operates in our work.

We plan to follow the survey with another over the summer of 2017.

So, what did the survey tell us?

- The average age is 46
- 65% have qualified since 1996
- 54% work in Southern England
- 64% are self employed
- 70% see fewer than 60 patients each week
- 31% work on their own
- 70% are happy with the amount of work they have
- Over 80% believe being a regulated health professional is important
Personal Details of respondents

The chiropractic profession has long been characterised by an equal split between men and women, and this was demonstrated by the survey. 11 more females responded than their male counterparts.

The average age of respondents was 46. Just over half of chiropractors (53%) are 45 or older, with 17 chiropractors being aged 65 or above. Only one in five (19%) chiropractors are aged 34 or below.
Chiropractors have only been able to register with us since 1999, when the register opened. Not unsurprisingly, 61% of registrants registered with us for the first time in the five year period following the Council’s establishment.

We also asked respondents where they studied chiropractic. The Anglo European Chiropractic College had a clear lead, with just over 40% of respondents having studied there, with the McTimoney College accounting for one in four respondents and the Welsh Institute of Chiropractic 19%.

16 chiropractors had graduated from institutions that no longer offer chiropractic degrees. Eight people had qualified from the Oxford College of Chiropractic and the University of Surrey respectively.

15% of respondents had qualified abroad. The USA, with 40 graduates, accounted for just under half of the foreign qualified chiropractors. Australia was the next most popular, followed by South Africa. Small numbers of graduates also came from Canada, France and New Zealand.
Chiropractors in Work

There is a clear preference amongst the profession for working in Southern England. The South East of England is the most popular location, with 131 chiropractors being located in the area. A further 101 respondents were located in the South West – between them, these two regions account for 42% of respondents. Add the 54 chiropractors based in Greater London, and the proportion increases to 53%.

The two areas with the fewest chiropractors are the North East and North West of England – only 38 respondents were from these two regions, 7% of the total.

Scotland and Wales account for 33 and 31 registrants each, with Northern Ireland contributing a further 10 respondents. Four were from the Isle of Man, while Gibraltar, the newest territory we regulate, provided two respondents.

Twenty five were working abroad. The most popular destination was Asia, which accounted for ten responses. Australasia contributed another eight, there were three responses from Europe (two from an EU country, one from outside the EU) while we had two responses each from North America and Africa.

64% of chiropractors were self employed, but only 31% of the profession work on their own. This reflects the tendency of chiropractors to often work in several different locations or clinics, often as a self employed associate.

Despite this, the increasing trend of health professions to work together was also reflected in the survey. One in four work alongside other health professionals. Physiotherapists, sports therapists and massage therapists were the most popular groups that chiropractors work alongside, pilates instructors, GPs, yoga, podiatrists, counsellors, acupuncturists and nutritional therapists were less popular.
Unlike many health professions, it is also clear that the development of a ‘corporate’ structure is yet to happen. Only 6% of respondents worked for a group of chiropractic clinics, with a similar number working for a group of health clinics.

The Working Week

Just over half (56%) work for more than 31 hours per week, with the majority of the rest working for between one and 30 hours per week. A small number are temporarily not working (travelling, or taking maternity leave, for example), and 5 are in employment, but are not working as a chiropractor.

Three quarters - 70% - said that they are happy with the amount of work they are doing.

However, 22% are looking for more work. 16 of them said why. Seven said that they were not being paid enough, with two of them specifically commenting on the high cost of living in the South East of England and one noting that business had yet to return to pre-recession levels. What wasn’t apparent from the answers – and maybe worthy of further investigation – is if chiropractors in this group want more work to increase their income or if, considering how many are self employed, they need more work for their businesses to survive.

Four commented that they would like more work but prospective patients are unaware of the benefits of chiropractic, and two that they would like to work more so they can help more people.

9% of respondents are looking to do less work. 29 told us why, with eight of them saying that they are looking to reduce their hours as a consequence of getting older, while seven - maybe at the other end of the age spectrum – wanted to spend more time with their children. Having too many patients and wanting to take more time off were also popular reasons for wanting less work.

Despite spending most of their time with patients, respondents see a relatively small number of patients each week. Almost 70% see fewer than 60 patients each week. However, despite
this, 20% of respondents are working in a more high pressure environment, seeing more than 80 patients each week. 25 of the chiropractors who see more than 100 patients a week told us how many – a quarter see 150, and only five see more than this, however, one busy chiropractor reckons to see 300 patients each week!

Three quarters of them spend at least 61% of their time with patients, and only 10% spend less than 30% of their time with patients.

How chiropractors grow their practices was another question we asked. ‘Word of mouth’ was used by over 300 chiropractors, with three quarters also relying on a website / social media
to generate new business. Referrals from other health professionals account for just under half of new business.

Only 2 chiropractors had received referrals from NHS Direct, reflecting the lack of involvement with the NHS by the profession. Only nine chiropractors who responded to the survey spend more than 26% of their time on NHS work. 496 chiropractors (over 98%) do less than this.

138 respondents told us why they don’t do any work for the NHS. What is interesting, is that only 2 of the 138 said that they would like to work with NHS patients.

The most common reason, quoted by a quarter of them, for not doing NHS funded work was that there is no funding or opportunities to do NHS work in their area. However, the other responses suggest that even if NHS work was available, chiropractors may not be keen to take advantage.

25 respondents commented that the application process was too complex, while 19 said that they didn’t want to do NHS work. Common reasons for this included the levels of bureaucracy associated with NHS work, and a perception that NHS funded patients would not make engaged patients.

The lack of long term contracts was identified as a barrier to NHS work by 18 respondents, who commented that it wasn’t worth devoting the time and effort to get an NHS contract as it didn’t last long enough to get a return on this investment. 16 are busy enough and don’t need any additional work, while 14 respondents were concerned about a lack of understanding of chiropractic within the NHS. They suggested that until awareness of the benefits of chiropractic was more widely known amongst NHS staff, it was unlikely that there would be any significant take up of chiropractic by the NHS.

A third of chiropractors find themselves in management or supervisory roles. With most of these managing other employees rather than chiropractors, this may again be a reflection of
the profession being characterised by a significant number of small, one chiropractor operations where the managing chiropractor manages a receptionist / office manager.

As well as their CPD, a quarter of respondents are planning to undertake further training.

154 told us what they are hoping to do. The most popular course is a MSc in Chiropractic, closely followed by courses in paediatrics. Animal chiropractic also attracted the interest of 12 respondents. Other courses which attracted significant numbers of respondents included nutrition, craniopathy, sports chiropractic, chiropractic PhDs, acupuncture and functional medicine.
The Importance of Regulation

Over 80% of respondents said that being a regulated health professional was important to them, and only 6% said that it wasn’t at all important.

The overwhelming reason that they gave for valuing regulated status was patient safety, identified by 65 of the 149 who gave a reason for valuing their regulated status. 32 respondents said that regulation gave them credibility, while 22 raised the issue of professional status.

With regulation being so important to chiropractors, it is no surprise that more than 92% of registrants make patients aware that they are registered with us. Over half display their
registration certificate, and a third use their registration number, with one on four using our ‘I'm Registered’ logo.

The reasons why chiropractors make patients aware they are registered reflect why they value regulation. Respondents overwhelmingly commented on the need to re-assure patients that they are seeing a highly trained professional who adheres to high standards. What also emerged from the responses was the re-assurance that patients took from using a regulated professional, with new patients often asking about a chiropractor’s status and qualifications.

The small number who didn't make patients aware they were regulated tended to either be working on a 'locum' type basis and so not have a permanent base or patient list, or alternatively they were working abroad.
Practising v Non Practising

95% of the chiropractors who responded are registered as practising, with only 34 chiropractors being registered as non-practising.

Practising v. Non Practising

We asked the 34 non practising registrants why they chose to register as non practising. 31 of them told us. The most popular reason was they were working abroad, which 19 chose. A further 5 were on maternity leave, 3 were not practising here (they didn’t say if they were not working as a chiropractor here or if they were practising abroad) and three said they were unable to work for health reasons. One was on sabbatical.

Why Aren't you practising?