

# Professionalism

## The Patients' Perspective

**GCC Patient Community: Project One**

**December 2022**



**I had no idea  
chiropractors had to be  
registered with the GCC,  
dramatically increasing  
my confidence in their  
profession and services.**

**Shila**  
(GCC Patient Community member)

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## Executive Summary

As part of its [2022-24 Strategy](#) commitments, the General Chiropractic Council (GCC) has established its GCC Patient Community comprising 20 chiropractic patients. Its purpose is to inform the GCC of patient motivators, influences and perceptions on choosing a chiropractor, especially as this healthcare choice has a cost consideration.

The Patient Community will ultimately contribute the 'patient voice' to the GCC's decision-making processes.

### Understanding professionalism

In June 2022, the GCC Patient Community held an online forum to explore the patient perspective of professionalism among chiropractors. Its objectives were to:

- Define the principles of professionalism between chiropractors and patients.
- Understand if registrant perspectives regarding professionalism match those of the patients they serve.
- Explore specific elements of professionalism, ie. the impact on business interests, the consumer vs patient dynamic and the role of clinical expertise.
- Inform what additional information and resources were required for patients in the [GCC Patient Portal](#) and registrants in the [Professionalism](#) section of its website.

### Key findings

#### 1) Patients have a positive experience of chiropractic.

Almost all GCC Patient Community members had a positive experience of chiropractic care and being treated with compassion and respect. They perceived the professionalism of chiropractors to be on a par with dentists but below that of General Practitioners. **(Page six)**

#### 2) Patients define communication, integrity and skills & knowledge as the key to professionalism.

Patient Community members frequently associate several words with being professional, such as knowledge, understanding, listening, politeness and respect. These words helped identify common themes that defined the patients' view of professionalism.

These common themes were (good) communication, integrity and skills & knowledge. In combination, they delivered additional themes related to patient-centred care and the professional environment in which chiropractors operated. **(Page nine)**

#### 3) Patient and chiropractor views of professionalism slightly differ.

Patient Community members' views of professionalism are based on their interactions with chiropractors. In contrast, research with GCC registrants revealed professionalism to be more multi-faceted, demonstrating leadership, inter-professional working and professional development as equally important with

chiropractors. These additional aspects of professionalism are clearly less visible to patients. **(Page 14)**

**4) Patients see themselves as patients, not customers.**

All Patient Community members recognised the transactional nature of the relationship with their chiropractors. However, most identified themselves as patients rather than customers, although the two perspectives were not thought to be mutually exclusive.

The Patient Community expressed high expectations of professionalism from chiropractors, primarily as healthcare professionals but also because there was a direct cost involved. **(Page 17)**

**5) Professionalism isn't confined to the workplace.**

Patient Community members did not spontaneously refer to the need for chiropractors to maintain professionalism outside the workplace. When prompted, most took a more liberal position and stressed that chiropractors were entitled to a private life. However, members did not condone extreme or illegal behaviours or chiropractors overstepping the boundaries of the patient-professional relationship, including inappropriate use of social media. **(Page 20)**

**6) Patients are reassured by regulatory oversight and its promotion.**

Few Patient Community members had any actual knowledge of regulation, ie. Education Standards, Fitness to Practise etc., but assumed that there was some form of oversight of the chiropractic profession. Confidence in the profession increased when they discovered more about the GCC and its functions.

The Patient Community were positive about the idea of chiropractors displaying the GCC [I'm Registered](#) identity mark, believing it would be more successful if linked to greater patient education around healthcare regulation. **(Page 23)**

## **Recommendations**

- 1) **For the GCC** to reposition, develop and promote the value and use of the I'm Registered identity, creating a comprehensive suite of resources for registrants to apply throughout their communication channels.
- 2) **For the Profession** to promote the value of regulation from a patient and public perspective.
- 3) **For Registrants** to adopt the I'm Registered identity, helping to provide extra reassurance to patients on their standards of professionalism.

# One: Patients' experiences of chiropractic care

## GCC Patient Community:

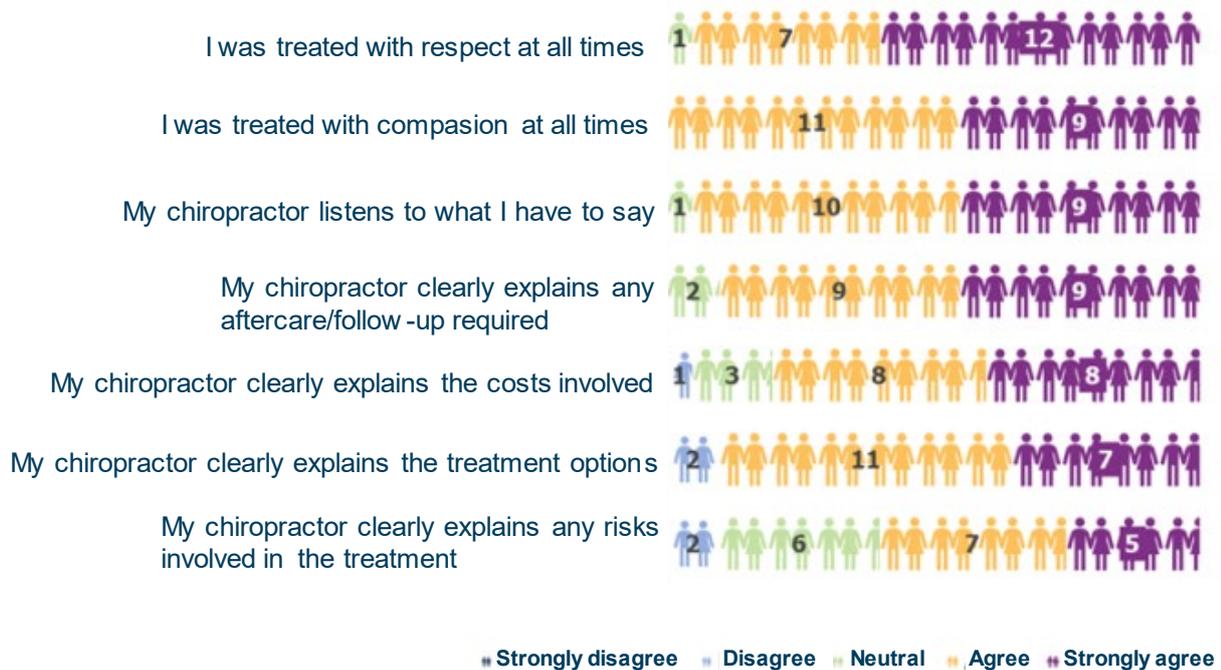
### Satisfaction with specific elements of chiropractic care during a recent appointment.

Overall, GCC Patient Community members generally reported positive experiences relating to particular elements of chiropractic care. Specifically:

- All patients agreed or strongly agreed that they were treated with compassion.
- All but one patient agreed or strongly agreed that they were treated with respect at all times and that their chiropractor listened to what they had to say.

Patient Community views were more mixed about knowing what to expect from the first appointment with a chiropractor and having any risks involved in the treatment clearly explained.

Figure one: Patient satisfaction with aspects of chiropractic care



## **GCC Patient Community:**

### **Chiropractic standing compared with other healthcare professionals.**

Chiropractic is a relatively small but valuable part of the UK's health and social care provision, delivering high-quality treatment to a large patient base. The GCC was interested in establishing how its Patient Community members compare chiropractic to other healthcare professionals.

Broadly, the Patient Community's positive experiences of their chiropractic care (page six) are reflected in how they view chiropractors within a spectrum of healthcare professionals.

When ranked in order, chiropractors were below General Practitioners (GPs), equal to dentists, and above physiotherapists and osteopaths. (Figure two: page eight)

### **No profession is perfect.**

Although GPs scored highly in terms of overall rankings, discussions about the relative positions revealed that several Patient Community members held negative views of GPs due to:

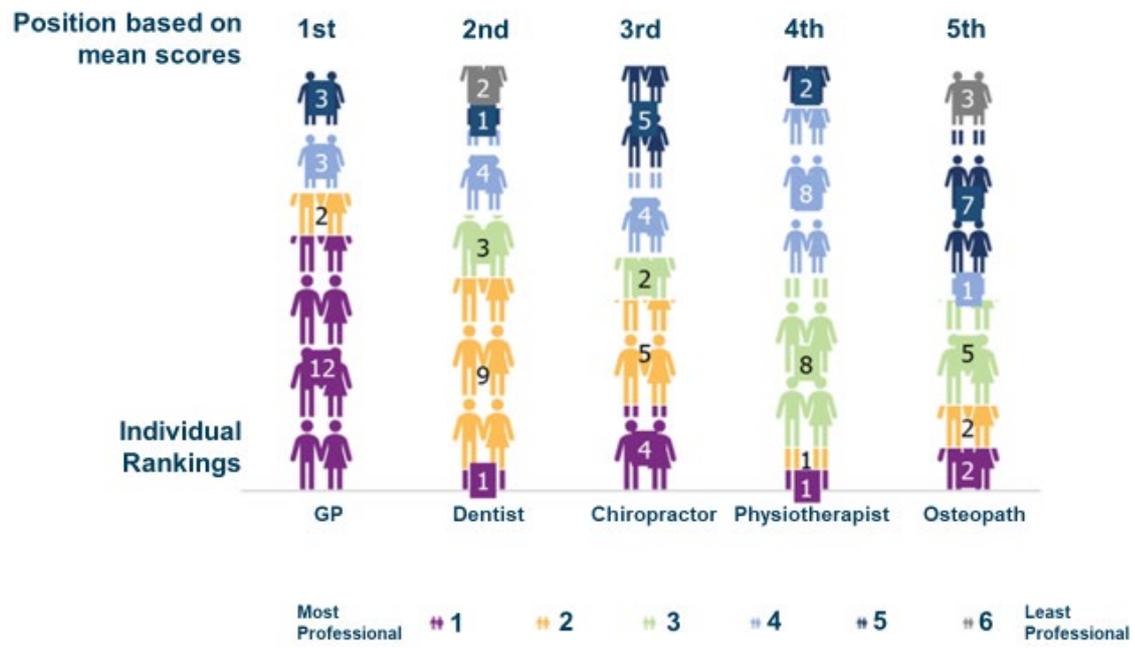
- Difficulties in securing face-to-face appointments during and beyond COVID-19 restrictions.
- Concerns that they were not being listened to by their GP.
- Being too quick to offer medication as a solution rather than make referrals or investigate an issue further.

Similarly, some Patient Community members held negative opinions towards physiotherapists for comparable reasons, ie. lengthy referral times and the inability to see physiotherapists face-to-face.

Some Community members expressed particularly positive views about their chiropractor as they had experienced being passed around by other healthcare professionals who could not resolve their issues. Although this is a positive final note, it should be remembered that the discussion was focused on different professions at this point.

As stated within the research methodology (page 26), the results cannot be seen beyond those of the Patient Community members but generally reflect past research.

Figure two: Ranking of professions in terms of professionalism



## Two: Patients' understanding of professionalism

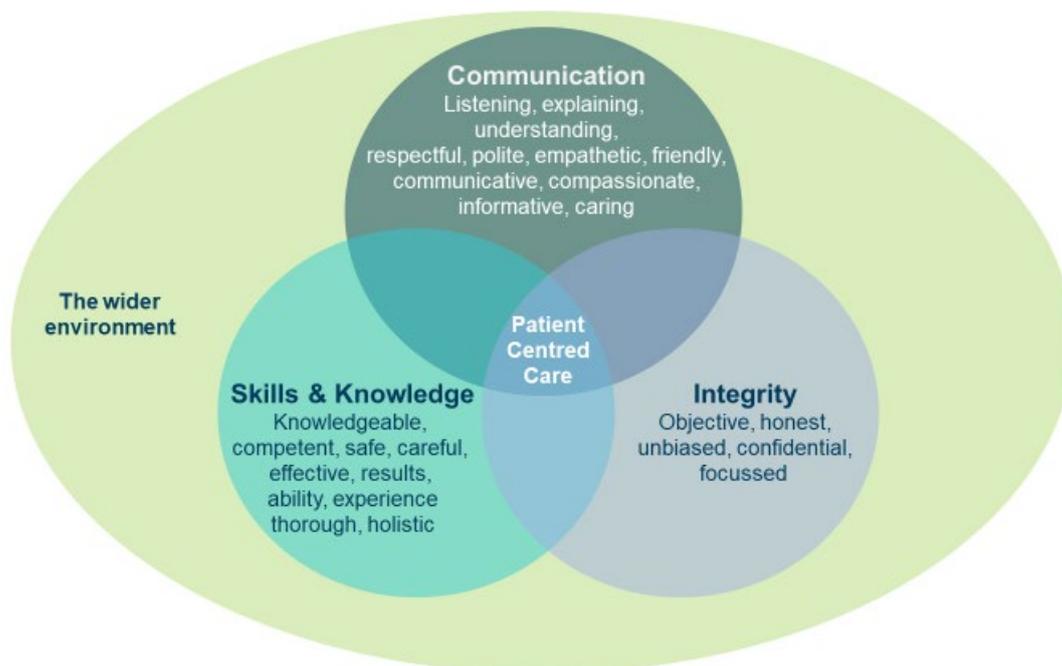
### GCC Patient Community:

#### Spontaneous views of professionalism based on word association.

GCC Patient Community members were asked for three words that they associated with a chiropractor demonstrating professionalism. The word cloud (Figure four: page 10) shows the keywords, with the size of each word indicating its frequency of use by Patient Community members; the larger-sized words being cited more often than the smaller ones.

The cloud shows that words such as knowledge, understanding, listening, polite and respectful are most commonly associated with professionalism. However, it is perhaps more useful to review the words as a whole and to identify common themes, as shown in figure three. The broad themes represented appear to be communication, skill/knowledge and, to some extent, integrity. There is some overlap between these themes as many are interrelated.

Figure three: Key themes drawn from word association





## **GCC Patient Community outcomes:**

### **Key themes emerging from storytelling and discussions.**

Patient Community members were asked to recount a story of when they felt a chiropractor behaved professionally, focussing on the positive behaviours. These stories went on to develop into three broad themes of professionalism identified by the word association:

- 1) The importance of good communication
- 2) The skills and knowledge of a chiropractor
- 3) Behaving with integrity

#### **1) The importance of good communication**

In almost all stories, Patient Community members gave examples of good communication demonstrating professionalism. These examples generally encompassed:

- Listening to the patient.
- Understanding and empathising with the patient.
- Offering values-based practice and facilitating a two-way discussion and shared decision-making.
- Explaining the treatment and costs in a way that patient understands.

Patients consider good communication as a cornerstone of professionalism for several reasons:

- It assured them that any treatment was appropriate to their condition and individual circumstances.
- It ensured that they understood costs, treatment options and possible outcomes before commencing a one-off or an ongoing series of appointments.
- It reduced a patient's anxiety and apprehension if visiting a chiropractor for the first time.

By offering clear explanations of treatments and costs, patients believed that chiropractors were demonstrating knowledge of chiropractic care and integrity, two integral themes of professionalism from the patients' perspective.

Several Patient Community members took good communication further, connecting it to values-based practice. Value-based practice is where the chiropractor seeks to understand what patients genuinely value rather than making assumptions regarding a successful treatment outcome based on their views and experience.

The role of communication in defining professionalism is well-documented. For example, a report by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), [\*Professionalism in health care professions\*](#), highlighted that professionals regard communication as an expression of

professional attitudes and behaviours encompassing politeness, trustworthiness, honesty, confidence, acting calmly, being personable, and treating patients as individuals.

The stories the GCC Patient Community shared touched on all these elements to varying degrees. However, at a more fundamental level, the stories reflected chiropractic patients' overwhelming need to feel listened to, understood and empathised with when they were often in pain, feeling vulnerable and maybe using chiropractic care for the first time.

### What the Patient Community members said:

"When the session started, I was very reluctant, which the chiropractor noticed without me saying anything, and she went way above to talk me through her process, which put me at ease. Her decision to explain her technique made the session go way better than I expected. After that first time, I booked a follow-up appointment because she had gained my trust by displaying professionalism and knowledge."

**Jennifer**

"The chiropractor's professional behaviour was to get as much information as possibly linked to my pain and experience, which greatly benefitted the person to have a whole picture and how to help me."

**Flippy**

## 2) The skills and knowledge of the chiropractor

Overall, GCC Patient Community members judged knowledge and skills through their chiropractor's detailed explanation of the treatment. This outcome corroborates research into professionalism from the General Dental Council (GDC), which similarly highlighted that those patients often used communication as a proxy for knowledge, not having the clinical expertise or experience to judge a healthcare professional's knowledge and skills.

The HCPC, GDC and GCC research all reinforce the importance of good communication as a critical core theme of professionalism from the patients' perspective.

That said, for several Patient Community members, the skills and knowledge of their chiropractor were demonstrated by the almost immediate alleviation of pain. In one instance, a patient assessed their chiropractor's skill against videos they had viewed online.

### What the Patient Community members said:

"I feel like I was given lots of information and was able to ask questions; they seemed very knowledgeable and skilled."

**Cassie**

"He was sympathetic and professional; before you know it, I had relief after battling pain for five weeks."

**Cheryl**

### **3) Behaving with integrity**

Although Patient Community members were asked to share positive experiences of professionalism within their chiropractic care, the role of integrity within professionalism generally emerged from patients giving examples of when they believed a chiropractor had not behaved in a way that they deemed professional.

Examples included:

- The chiropractor cancelled several appointments.
- The chiropractor not charging the advertised price.
- The chiropractor recommends multiple appointments without seeing any progress.

The topics of over-promising or misselling are further explored on page 18.

#### **The role of the environment when assessing professionalism**

While this research focuses on demonstrating professional behaviours, it is important to remember that these behaviours will be judged within the environment in which they are displayed.

In addition to the three themes related to how chiropractors demonstrated professionalism, several stories and subsequent discussions also highlighted the influence of the wider environment in which the chiropractor operates as impacting perceptions of professional behaviour.

Mentions of the website, reception (in terms of staff attitudes, manner and space), treatment rooms and payment options (offering cashless alternatives) all added to a sense of professionalism.

#### **Placing patient-centred care at the heart**

Finally, the call for patient-centred care was central to much of the feedback from the Patient Community. They tended to view a chiropractor as being professional if they provided care focussed on them as individuals.

For this reason, patient-centred care has been placed at the heart of the image in Figure three (page nine) as it encompasses many of the attributes referenced by patients when discussing professionalism, ie. empathy and respect, holistic care and shared decision-making.

#### **What the Patient Community members said:**

“An appointment I was due was cancelled three times at short notice due to personal family-related issues with the chiropractor not being able to attend work as normal at various times. Cancelling the appointment was OK once, as these things happen, but I deemed it unprofessional a second and third time.”

**Simon**

“The chiropractor was very professional from the beginning, such as listening to my concerns and explaining how treatments can help improve my neck pain. I was very impressed with the amount of detail the chiropractor put into it. However, after the session, I was asked to pay £80, but the website price said £40. When I asked why there was a price difference, I was told that due to COVID-19, they had increased their prices. This sounded and felt like every private clinic was taking advantage of COVID-19 and taking advantage of people in need.”

**Indu**

“My first chiropractor kept me coming back week after week with no change. My new chiropractor wants me to have as few sessions as possible. Both chiropractors seem professional; however, the second one is more attentive as they are trying to get me to go less, which appears more professional.”

**Jacob**

## **GCC Patient Community:**

### **Differences between professionals and patients**

As part of this research, the GCC Patient Community were shown a video of professionals sharing their views of professionalism. The video was output from research conducted by Community Research in 2020 for the HCPC and GCC. In this previous research, stakeholders and registrants shared stories about professionalism that generally revolved around:

- Interactions with patients/service users
- Interactions with colleagues
- Effective leadership
- The development of inner professional qualities

Having watched the video, Patient Community members immediately recognised that professionals took a multi-dimensional view of professionalism compared to patients. Patients spoke broadly of good communication, integrity and knowledge in the context of the patient interaction because that was how they experienced the professionalism of chiropractors; it is what the earlier story-telling approach had encouraged them to focus on. In contrast, patients recognised that chiropractors spoke of professionalism in various contexts beyond patient interaction.

As expected, professionals cited adherence to standards as a defining feature of professionalism, but patients did not mention this as it was outside their initial frame of reference. Chapter five (page 22) explores patients' awareness and understanding of standards and regulations in the context of their views of professionalism.

That said, patients recognised that some of the professionals' views of professionalism aligned with the broad themes they identified relating to communication, knowledge and integrity.

Indeed, within the stories shared by professionals in the previous [HCPC/GCC research](#), the following common themes emerged, across the four categories of stories, that highlighted professionals believed professionalism involved at its core:

- Good communication, including compassion, empathy, honesty and trustworthiness.
- A service-user-centred approach, including putting patients/service-users first, treating people equally and without prejudice and doing the right thing.
- Competence, including continual professional development (CPD).
- Reflection.

Understanding professionalism from a professional's perspective further enhanced patients' positive views of chiropractors, suggesting that there may be a benefit in broadening the patients' idea of professionalism and getting them to think beyond the patient interaction, particularly around how chiropractors develop themselves as professionals.

### What the Patient Community members said:

“We judge professionalism based on what we think or how we feel a particular profession should act or behave in any given situation. I believe that's why things like keeping skills up to date weren't mentioned when reflecting on professionalism.”

**Jennifer**

“The Patient Community's comments don't touch upon the code of conduct or the interaction with their teams or colleagues they manage. This is because we don't see their code of conduct or see them within their teams.”

**Simon**

“I did not know chiropractors follow a code of conduct, so this was new information for me. I also assumed once a chiropractor has the knowledge and skills to do their job, their learning stops, whereas they have to keep their skills up to date is refreshing to know.”

**Mahmood**

## Three: Patients' views of specific aspects of professionalism

As well as sharing positive stories relating to the professionalism of chiropractors and watching videos highlighting professionals' views, the GCC Patient Community were asked for their thoughts on several specific aspects of professionalism.

### **GCC Patient Community:**

#### **Empathy and compassion**

Several Patient Community members had spontaneously referred to empathy and compassion within good communication. Both words emerged from the spontaneous word association exercise and were alluded to in positive stories about professionalism (Chapter two: page nine).

When the Patient Community members were asked to share their understanding of empathy and compassion in more detail, one or two tried to distinguish between empathy and compassion; however, most put empathy and compassion in the same box. They explained that both represented a genuine desire to understand a person, the ability to put oneself in another person's shoes, listening and taking an interest, and never judging.

While the Community did not always make an obvious distinction between empathy and compassion, most offered some insight into what empathy and compassion looked like within the context of chiropractic care:

- Not dismissing or belittling the patient's view of their pain.
- Visibly showing an interest in the patient throughout treatment by not:
  - performing other tasks while listening to the patient
  - keeping good notes that could be referred to for subsequent appointments
  - not making the patient feel rushed.
- Using appropriate language that the patient can easily understand.

Patients recognised that by displaying empathy and compassion, chiropractors could put patients at ease and engender trust. However, they also agreed that chiropractors needed to strike the right balance of showing empathy and compassion. They warned that 'going overboard' on empathy and compassion was likely to look insincere to the patient, make the patient feel uncomfortable, alarm the patient about their condition, and cause the patient to question the chiropractor's motivations.

#### **What the Patient Community members said:**

"Empathy is understanding, listening, and caring even though you may not have been through that yourself. Compassion is a similar feeling for the person, offering an ear, caring and letting the person speak."

**Hannah**

“Compassion and empathy can be displayed by not being judgmental, listening and never assuming that a person's pain is not as bad as they might describe.”

**Jennifer**

“By listening to the client's individual needs, making notes and keeping a record so that you can discuss how the treatment is working in future appointments. Show emotion rather than be robotic with a ten-minute cracking session, and that's it.”

**Marissa**

“When you talk to us, you use the words that we know and don't make us feel stupid.”

**Bron**

“Suppose you don't feel listened to and the professional doesn't understand your point of view and where you are coming from. In that case, it may erode the vital trust for a good relationship between patient and professional. Too much may come across as insincere, as with any emotional feeling.”

**Iain**

## **GCC Patient Community: The patient/customer dynamic**

When the GCC Patient Community was asked if they saw themselves mainly as a customer/consumer or a patient, the majority confirmed that they saw themselves as patients. They explained that the relationship between chiropractors and patients was more than transactional and trusted chiropractors with their health and wellbeing. Chapter four (page 21) further explores how chiropractors are seen within the context of a broader subset of healthcare professionals.

That said, a number of patients viewed themselves as both a patient and a customer; the two are not mutually exclusive. There were many elements of their reported behaviour which suggests that they do view themselves as a consumer, for example:

- Citing examples when they had 'shopped around' and tried different practitioners.
- Using or expecting discounts or special offers, ie. mention of Groupon vouchers or an expectation of reductions for block bookings.
- Considering their experience in terms of 'value for money'.

Regardless of the extent to which Patient Community members regarded themselves as a patient or a customer, all had high expectations of professionalism in chiropractic care:

- They were paying for a service from their purse rather than from the taxation system.
- They recognised that chiropractic care was not constrained by NHS funding.

For these reasons, patients expected a more patient-centric experience which, in turn, was often linked to being more professional. For example, chiropractors were expected to have more time to communicate with the patient.

While most Patient Community members regarded themselves as patients (albeit to varying degrees), several turned the question around and queried whether chiropractors took a different view and perceived patients as customers. The minority of patients who had a negative experience with a chiropractor in the past were most likely to question this.

Patient Community members put forward other potential examples (not based on experience) of a chiropractor's business interests getting in the way of professionalism. These included:

- Chiropractors not actively looking to reduce the number of appointments required (through self-treatment/exercises at home).
- Chiropractors not trying as hard or not offering the same treatment options at the initial appointment if they think a patient can't afford follow-up appointments. However, one patient pointed out that this could be a result of tailoring the treatment option to the patient's needs.
- Chiropractors agreeing to more appointments (at the patient's request) even when they don't believe further treatment will offer a health benefit to the patient.

### **How to talk about costs**

The Patient Community were asked if they had any advice for chiropractors about how to approach discussing costs with their patient. Much of the advice given can be linked back to the original theme of integrity, as patients called for:

- Chiropractors to be upfront and honest about the costs involved in the treatment.
- To be open about the number of treatments that might be required, and the potential ongoing costs involved from the very first appointment.
- Offering an advertised pricing policy, where possible.
- Highlighting any price differences between self-pay and insurance customers.
- Offering clarity about the length and make-up of the individual appointment so patients have a clearer idea of what they are paying for, ie:
  - how much of the time will be administrative
  - how much of the time will be active treatment
- Offering to review any ongoing treatment to see if it is delivering against expectations, and
- Offering a refund for sessions purchased in advance if the treatment is not working.

## What the Patient Community members said:

“I see myself as a patient because I feel chiropractors come under the medical 'umbrella' for me. These professionals are concerned with the human body, particularly the spine, and alleviating pain. I can be a customer when I go into a shop and buy something and may never return to that shop again, whereas being a patient can turn into a long relationship with the chiropractor, similarly to a GP.”

**Mahmood**

“I see myself as a paying patient, so a mix of both. I know that it is a service that I am paying for, but I also want the chiropractor to see past the financial transaction and see me as someone who requires their help.”

**Kevin**

“NHS versus private is drastically different. Private is supposed to be more compassionate and give personal attention to clients and their needs.”

**Marissa**

“I feel that my first chiropractor was keener on making a good living than outright patient care as he had his studio setup and saw multiple patients at the same time, so actual face-to-face treatment time was very limited per appointment (about 8 mins).

I felt this was poor value for money as opposed to seeing one patient at a time, as is usual at all other medical appointments I have attended. It made me feel like I was on a production line!”

**Iain**

“For example, a paying patient might want multiple sessions, maybe against the chiropractor's advice. Because they are paying, the chiropractor might decide to go ahead even though it might not be required, which defies professionalism.”

**Jennifer**

“Be upfront, even if that means saying the patient will have to come more than once or many times etc. I don't see it as an admission of failure; it's more honest and open to discussing the process and for the patient to be made aware that more treatment may be needed in future (at a cost). If that isn't possible due to financial constraints, I would hope they would engage in a proper conversation about how the patient can work to help themselves rather than go with a 'Well, I tried' approach. It's about treating people with respect - practitioner and patient alike. And money shouldn't be the dirty word it's made out to be.”

**Christophe**

## **GCC Patient Community: Behaviour outside the workplace**

Spontaneous discussions between the Patient Community members on professionalism centred on the workplace, mainly due to patients' views of professionalism being grounded in the patient interaction with the chiropractor.

Behaviours outside the workplace alongside other components of professionalism, such as adhering to [The Code](#) and maintaining skills and knowledge, were not referred to by patients without prompting.

When prompted, many patients expressed the view that chiropractors were entitled to a life beyond work without impacting their professionalism.

That said, underneath the surface, these liberal views on professionalism outside of the workplace came with several caveats, with patients also stating that chiropractors should:

- Keep within the law, with particular mention of the use of illegal drugs.
- Not overstep the boundaries of the patient-professional relationship, ie. becoming overfamiliar or discussing treatment outside of the workplace.

GCC Patient Community views did range over a broad spectrum. While most felt that behaviour outside the workplace would not influence their opinions of professionalism, some indicated that they held chiropractors up to higher standards and that they would not expect a professional to act rudely to others or get drunk when away from the work environment.

Mention was also made of the need for chiropractors to be conscious that their reputation could be damaged by what they post on social media.

### **What the Patient Community members said:**

"For me, as long as the chiropractor is professional in the workplace, and does not do anything illegal, then they are entitled to be "off the clock" as everyone else."

**Kevin**

"Understanding boundaries or not trying to familiarise with a patient outside of the work environment is good professional behaviour. For me, starting a conversation with a patient outside the work environment is very unprofessional or discussing a health-related issue outside the work environment. This also goes for social media."

**Jennifer**

## Four: How expectations of chiropractors differ from other professions

The GCC Patient Community were asked whether they felt their expectations of chiropractors differed from those of other professions. More often than not, when considering this question, patients placed chiropractors within a specific subset of healthcare professionals.

For most, the expectations of healthcare professionals were different to the expectations they had of other professionals for several reasons:

- Healthcare professionals were thought to be dealing with people in more vulnerable situations, so a higher degree of trust was required.
  - Patients had a more intimate (and often long-standing) relationship with healthcare professionals (often involving physical contact).
  - Patients may well be ill and in pain.
- By their intrinsic nature and as a result of the type of work they do, healthcare professionals are believed to be more empathetic. Therefore, expectations around empathy are greater for this subset of professionals.

Figure five: Positioning of healthcare professional



### What the Patient Community members said:

"I feel that being a chiropractor or health professional is vastly different from being a teacher/solicitor because you as a chiropractor have the health and well-being of all your clients at heart."

**Ninian**

"I think for professionals that treat people, especially with physical contact, there's a need never to be called into question or for inappropriate conduct as I think it is a field built on reputation."

**Andrew**

## Five: Awareness and understanding of the regulation of chiropractors

### GCC Patient Community:

#### Levels of awareness

Most GCC Patient Community members appeared to have faith in the chiropractic profession but had little fundamental knowledge of its regulation. This lack of knowledge reflects research undertaken by Community Research for other health professions' regulators, including a study on behalf of the GMC on public confidence in the medical profession.

In the absence of this knowledge, confidence in the chiropractic profession was driven by several factors:

- An assumption (rather than knowledge) of some form of oversight, governing body and regulation.
- Faith in online reviews of chiropractic treatments.
- A belief that chiropractors would not be able to successfully operate as businesses if they didn't deliver what they promised.

A lack of actual regulation knowledge was accompanied by little understanding of the training and standards applicable to chiropractors. A quick poll of the Community revealed:

- Half of the patients (10/20) knew nothing or very little about the **training of chiropractors** (selecting 1 or 2 on a 5-point scale).
- Over half of patients (13/20) reported that they knew nothing or very little about the **standards that chiropractors are required to work to** (selecting 1 or 2 on a 5-point scale).
- The vast majority of patients (17/20) knew nothing or very little about what happens to **chiropractors if they fail to meet the standards** set out (selecting 1 or 2 on a 5-point scale).

While some patients had assumed that there would be some oversight of chiropractors, only one-quarter of patients (5/20) said they had heard of the GCC before participating in the research. Fewer patients recalled having seen the GCC logo (3/20) and none recalled visiting the GCC website with any certainty (see Figure 8).

In the absence of any actual knowledge of regulation, patients spoke of relying on online reviews and recommendations from friends and contacts when selecting a chiropractor. For several Patient Community members, learning about the GCC increased their confidence in the chiropractic profession. However, for others, finding out about the role and activities of the GCC clarified what they had assumed.

## What the Patient Community members said:

"As healthcare professionals, I assumed chiropractors would be a professional service, with guidelines and codes of conduct to follow and be regularly measured on this."

**Simon**

"I had no idea they had to be registered with the GCC, which has greatly increased my confidence in their profession and services."

**Shila**

"This information does not change how I feel or perceive the chiropractic profession. Without knowing who did this work, I naturally assumed somebody did, just like the more widely advertised GMC or Ofsted for teaching."

**Simon**

## **GCC Patient Community:**

### **The value of displaying the GCC logo**

Although some GCC Patient Community members had assumed that chiropractors were subject to some form of regulation and governance without knowing anything about the GCC, most welcomed the idea of chiropractors displaying the GCC logo or registration certificate.

They believed that a visible sign would give additional reassurance to patients, particularly those visiting a chiropractor for the first time and those who had not selected their chiropractor based on recommendations from friends and contacts.

Indeed, several patients recognised that the chiropractors they had visited already displayed the logo. However, patients also highlighted that showing a visible sign of regulation would only be truly effective if linked to patient education about regulation.

## What the Patient Community members said:

"I believe all chiropractors should display a registration certificate, so patients know this professional body that regulates chiropractors and enhances your confidence in the chiropractor you are seeing."

**Shante**

"I think displaying a registration certificate available so that you can refer to GCC and check their details will be important to some people, especially if they are not going through a recommendation or word of mouth."

**Kate**



## Recommendations with explanations

- 1) **For the GCC to reposition, develop and promote the value and use of the I'm Registered identity, creating a comprehensive suite of resources for registrants to apply throughout their communication channels.**



The GCC introduced the **I'm Registered** identity mark in 2020, following its corporate rebrand. The purpose of the I'm Registered logo (and accompanying assets) is to allow registrants to use a non-GCC corporate logo to promote their professional registration to patients. However, the use of the I'm Registered logo and assets has been limited.

This research has shown that patients value the knowledge that the chiropractic profession is regulated, and that chiropractors must be registered with the GCC. They find it reassuring that all GCC registrants must be appropriately qualified and are required to maintain strict CPD requirements. These findings correspond with other GCC and non-GCC research over the years.

In 2023, the GCC plans to reimagine and relaunch the I'm Registered identity alongside a registrant and public communication campaign. It aims to encourage registrants to adopt the identity mark, promote their hard-earned registration and provide that additional assurance to patients about their knowledge and skills.

For patients, the GCC will promote the I'm Registered identity and its meaning and value through various owned, earned and paid communication channels.

- 2) **For the Profession to promote the value of regulation from a patient and public perspective.**

The GCC will work with its stakeholders, namely the professional associations, to help promote the I'm Registered logo to their respective memberships. We believe that there is value and synergy for all stakeholders to promote the security of regulation for the benefit of all chiropractic patients.

As this research has shown, patients do not believe regulation to be a route to complain about chiropractors. They see it as an assurance of their professionalism.

- 3) **For Registrants to adopt the I'm Registered identity, helping to provide extra reassurance to patients on their standards of professionalism.**

The GCC will communicate the I'm Registered identity to all registrants. However, ultimately, it is for registrants to adopt its use and understand the value and security of regulation from a patient's perspective.

# Appendix One

## Background to research

Following extensive stakeholder consultation throughout 2021, the General Chiropractic Council (GCC) published its [GCC Strategy 2022-2024](#), focussing on four aims, each with its own objectives and expected outcomes.

The strategy's first aim, 'To place patients and their care at the centre of all GCC work', would be realised through three objectives, the first being to gain a greater understanding of patient needs and expectations, so these can be reflected in the work of the GCC.

To fulfil this objective, the GCC commissioned Community Research to establish the GCC Patient Community, a panel comprising a cross-section of 20 chiropractic patients (Figure six: page 27). Members of the Patient Community have agreed to take part in a series of qualitative research activities across several subjects over 12 months to:

- Reaffirm, confirm, establish, disprove or refute ideas and beliefs from within chiropractic.
- Develop a clearer picture of patient motivators, influences and perceptions on choosing or continuing to use a chiropractor.
- To bring the patient perspective to the GCC's decision-making processes.

## Research methodology

The methodology adopted for this first Patient Community research activity was an online forum hosted in Recollective. The forum took place over approximately seven days, with patients asked to log on five times over this period and respond to specific tasks and discussions.

A key part of the methodology was 'storytelling', whereby participants shared positive examples of professionalism that they had witnessed before exploring common themes. The online discussion forum followed a semi-structured guide to allow participants to elaborate on and freely discuss their stories, views and perceptions. Additional information regarding the GCC and registrants' views on professionalism was also shared.

Finally, while some polling results are reported within this report, this is a qualitative research study. As such, this kind of research cannot, and does not, seek to be representative of the wider population. It is not intended to be statistically reliable, nor does it conclude the extent to which something is valid for the wider population.

## Patient Community member quotes

On occasion, quotes from GCC Patient Community members have been edited or amended for grammatical and ease of reading/interpretation reasons. The context and outcomes of all quotes have not been changed in any way. A copy of the original, unedited quotes can be provided upon request.

**Figure six: GCC Patient Community membership**

GCC Patient Community Size	20	
Recency of visit	20	Members had visited a chiropractor at least once in the past six months.
Number of years GCC Patient Community members had sought chiropractic care	4	Less than 12 months
	11	1-3 years
	1	3-5 years
	4	6+ years
Nation	13	England
	2	Northern Ireland
	3	Scotland
	2	Wales
	10	Female
Sex	10	Male
	6	Under 35
Age	11	35-65
	3	65+
	6	AB
Socio-economic group	8	C1C2
	5	DE
	2	Caribbean
Ethnicity	2	Indian
	1	Pakistani
	1	White British: Black Caribbean
	14	White British: English, Irish, Scottish, Welsh, Other
	4	Long-term condition or disability

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