

Development of an audit tool to investigate the osteopathic management of patients during pregnancy

NCOR SUSSEX RESEARCH HUB

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Introduction

The most significant data connected with the osteopathic management of patients during pregnancy can be found from work carried out by Dr Stephen Sandler at the Expectant Mothers Clinic at the British School of Osteopathy¹. An examination of the literature indicates that one of the most frequently cited symptoms during pregnancy is low back pain; this has been described as occurring in between 50%^{2,3} to 82%⁴ of patients. Anecdotal evidence from private practice suggests to osteopaths that symptoms for which patients seek help during pregnancy can vary further to include gastro-oesophageal reflux, sacro-iliac pain, carpal tunnel syndrome and indigestion. The Sussex research hub has developed an audit tool and carried out a pilot audit to seek to objectively identify conditions experienced by patients during pregnancy which are treated by osteopaths in private practice settings.

Methods

An initial literature search was conducted to try and identify any existing audit tools connected with this area of clinical practice. Searches were made using electronic databases including PubMed, AMED, CINAHL, BNI, PEDro and OSTMED. Hand-searching was also carried out to examine paper copies of osteopathic journals.

No existing tools were identified from the literature search. A draft audit tool was developed by the members of the Sussex research hub using a focus group approach. The tool was piloted, refined, piloted and further refined before a longer term prospective audit of three months was carried out by hub members.

Results

The initial data collection phase of the audit contributed a considerable amount of information concerning the osteopathic management of patients during pregnancy. Patients' age varied between 28 and 42 years (mean age: 32 years). A wide variety of symptoms were reported as shown in Table 1 below.

Symptom	Incidence of symptoms
Sciatic distribution of pain	14.0%
Neck pain and headache	21.0%
Symphysis pubis pain	7.5%
Low back and posterior thigh pain	7.5%
Mid thoracic pain	7.5%
Sacro-iliac and gluteal pain	7.5%
Restless leg syndrome	14.0%
Low back and gluteal pain	21.0%

Table 1

The mean number of weeks pregnant at first consultation was 20 weeks. The average pain score for patients at their first consultation was 7.2 when measured using a visual analogue scale.

Conclusion

Osteopaths treat a small number of patients in private practice for symptoms occurring during pregnancy. Osteopathy offered a safe and effective treatment intervention for patients seeking a drug-free method of managing their musculoskeletal symptoms during pregnancy.

Ethics

An opinion was not sought due to the audit based nature of this study.

Funding acknowledgement

No funding was sought for this project.

References

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3. Moore K, Dumas GA, Reid JG. Postural changes associated with pregnancy and their relationship to low back pain. *Journal of Clinical Biomechanics*. 1990;5:169-174.
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The Long Man of Wilmington – reputed to be a Sussex fertility symbol.

Image provided by Sussex Archaeological Society.
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