

Expressing Concerns, Resolving Complaints

This information is intended to help any patient, homeopathic student, practitioner or member of the public approach the Professional Conduct Department of The Society of Homeopaths for advice or help. It addresses some common concerns about how to do this.

Introduction

The Society of Homeopaths promotes the reputable practice of homeopathy. It is responsible for ensuring that its members abide by its Codes of Ethics and Practice, which exist for the protection of the public, and act as guidance for practising members.

General approach – initial stages

The Professional Conduct Department aims to resolve disagreement or complaint through the process of mediation where possible. It will support you talking directly to the practitioner concerned, assist you in this process where you ask for help, or ensure all points of view are clearly heard where any party feels dialogue is not taking place, or has broken down.

Misunderstandings or disagreements are frequently resolved through informal discussion. The Society encourages anyone with a concern to discuss this with the individual in question as a first step. It may be helpful to work out which relevant sections of the Code of Ethics & Practice you believe apply before approaching the person. A copy is available on request from The Society's office or on our website see link above.

Who can approach Professional Conduct?

- Any patient who considers their own experience of homeopathy does not meet the standards described in the Code of Ethics & Practice.
- Any Student or Registered member of the profession who is concerned about the standard of care provided by another practitioner (acting in a therapeutic, supervisory or tutorial role).
- Any member of the public who believes they have witnessed, or have information about, a breach of The Society of Homeopaths Codes of Ethics & Practice.

In order to take action on your behalf, the person concerned should have been an insured (i.e. Student Clinical or Registered) member of The Society at the time of the events about which you are concerned. You may also bring a student member of The Society to our attention if he or she was enrolled on a Society-recognised course at the time of the events about which you are concerned.

How recent? How old?

It is a common experience for some people that it can take time (often years) before some experiences are acknowledged or expressed. For this reason, although there may be legal time barriers on certain issues, there is no time limit for bringing your concerns to the attention of The Society.

What do I do?

If your own attempts to resolve a concern by way of discussion or correspondence have not met with success and you wish Professional Conduct to mediate on your behalf, write, giving full details and enclosing any supporting documentation to the Professional Conduct Department at The Society address (shown at the end of this leaflet). Please mark your envelope confidential. Sending your correspondence by Recorded Delivery ensures proof of both postage and receipt. Keep a copy of anything you send to us.

What then takes place?

Initially, the Professional Conduct Officer will acknowledge your letter, usually within 5 working days, indicating who will be dealing with the matter and how it will be progressed.

Please be aware that the next stage of the mediation process is to copy your correspondence to the named practitioner, asking for a response to be made directly to this Department.

When all the information has been gathered, the Professional Conduct Officer will either continue the process of mediation, or recommend a preliminary assessment (see below).

In the event of mediation, the Professional Conduct officer will:

- help the parties to reach an agreed resolution.
- ensure that mistakes are acknowledged and rectified.

What The Society is unable to do

Where you consider a Member has committed a criminal offence, you should report the matter to the Police. If seeking financial redress, your needs are better met by taking legal advice. In either of these situations, members are duty bound to report the details to their professional body, namely this Society. We are able to help only where there has been an alleged breach of the Code of Ethics and Practice.

Avoiding conflict of interest

The world of homeopathy is not a large one, and it may be that some element (you, your practitioner, the training institute) is known to the Professional Conduct Officer. The Society protects you against a possible conflict of interest by requiring any situation where this occurs to be safeguarded by involving a further member of the Professional Conduct Committee who will advise on procedure. If it is decided that the Officer is able to continue on your behalf, he is required to continue to liaise with that person and keep them informed of progress.

Should conflict of interest disallow further involvement by the Professional Conduct Officer, you will be directed either to the Professional Conduct Director, or to a further member of the Committee.

Preliminary assessment

Where an issue cannot be resolved by way of mediation, or an alleged misbehaviour is considered to be too serious for simple resolution or reconciliation, details are taken anonymously to Preliminary Assessment by a carefully selected team. Membership is drawn from both Registered Homeopaths and other professionals. Its task is to determine whether the issue may be taken forward. This is done by assessing whether the practitioner has breached the relevant Code of Ethics and Practice. Whatever the outcome of this process, you will be informed by letter and have the opportunity to comment further.

Formal complaint

Where Preliminary Assessment has recommended progression, or where a matter brought to The Society's attention is so serious that it is inappropriate for it to be dealt with via mediation or preliminary investigation, the Professional Conduct Department will apply its formal complaints procedure.

Confidentiality

All enquiries to the Professional Conduct Department are treated as confidential. The Society has a duty to respect your wishes whilst at the same time ensuring its members practise safely, legally and ethically.

What does confidential mean?

When concerns are expressed, information may be disclosed that one would otherwise prefer to remain private. The Society regards any information coming into its possession, whether labelled confidential or not, as a disclosure in confidence. This means that the substance of the concern is always and only communicated to the smallest number of people necessary to resolve it.

Where your concern calls for wider deliberation you will be kept informed. The Professional Conduct Officer has access to consultants external to the homeopathic profession.

Any permanent record or published statement relating to a complaint will also respect your confidentiality.

How is confidentiality safeguarded?

Any contact with the Professional Conduct Department is safeguarded by:

- Logging details of all letters, phone calls or personal contacts on a computer database, accessible only through a confidential security code.
- Ensuring the minimum number of Society staff have access to the minimum amount of information in respect of any enquiry.
- All staff of The Society and all members involved in enquiries being required to sign a confidentiality statement.

More about confidentiality:

In choosing to express a concern about a Society member (or make a complaint) it is sometimes difficult to appreciate all the implications of any disclosure on yourself. You may intend to disclose only a part of the content and process of an event, and then find yourself progressively drawn into more and more extensive disclosure as the process unfolds.

The Society has a duty to ensure that those bringing concerns or complaints understand the implications of disclosure and can make an informed decision.

How might this work in practice?

On initial contact, the Professional Conduct Officer will ask you if you are happy to have your name, address, and telephone contact number entered in the records – so that we can easily contact you if, for example, a phone call is interrupted.

Then, together, we will explore how the requirements of confidentiality apply to your individual concern, as soon as it becomes clear what this is. This will usually occur before you have given any substantial details. Often concerns are expressed in the form of:

If I were to tell you about such-and-such, what might then happen?

You will then be invited to describe your concern in detail, and asked what outcome you would like to see.

If your concern is about an individual, you will be asked for their name and address

At this point, your options are:

Not to divulge the identity of the person about whom you have a concern or complaint.

In this case, The Society can take no further action.

To reveal the person's identity, requesting that no further action be taken.

In this case your concern, and the identity of the individual remains on The Society Professional Conduct secure database as a safeguard in the event of any future concerns reaching the Society about the same individual.

Please note that under exceptional circumstances (where there has been a serious breach of the Code of Ethics and Practice, or there are legal implications) the Professional Conduct Department may be required to take advice before offering the above options.

To reveal the person's identity, requesting that further action be taken.

The Professional Conduct Department will mediate for you by approaching the individual concerned and asking for their comment on your concern. We will attempt to resolve the matter to the satisfaction of all parties. Where this proves to be unacceptable, the matter may be taken further.

The Society's Code of Ethics and Practice

Copies are available from the Society at the address below or on the website. There is a separate Code of Practice for Supervisors.

Professional Conduct Officer – Tel. 01604 817890

Your feedback on any part of this document is welcomed, particularly those areas where you feel it lacks clarity. Please send your comments to The Society Office.

Registered with the Data Protection Agency.

What should I do if the homeopath is not a Society member?

The Society is only able to take action on behalf of, or against, its members. Where your inquiry is about a homeopath who is a member of another professional organisation, you should contact an officer of that organisation.

If your homeopath is not registered with any professional body then the local Trading Standards Officer for your area may be able to help you. If this is not possible you may want to consider consulting a solicitor.

© The Society of Homeopaths, 11 Brookfield, Duncan Close, Moulton Park, Northampton NN3 6WL Tel: 01604 817890
Fax: 01604 648848 E-mail: info@homeopathy-soh.org