

Section Title



Multi-bed clinics

BELINDA COPPOCK

On behalf of the Safe Practice Committee

The Code of Safe Practice and the accompanying Guide were last updated in June 2006. The Safe Practice Committee is currently working on revisions/additions to the Code as the existing one needs fresh updating. One of the topics considered has been that of multi-bed clinics (MB) which are becoming more common.

An MB is a clinic where two or more patients are treated in the same room. The present Code has only one reference to MBs and that is the drop-in detox settings (section F, page 12). As we had little information on their prevalence, location and operation I was asked to find out a bit more about them to see how they might help us in drafting a new Code to include any Safe Practice issues specific to MBs.

The Safe Practice Committee compiled a list of queries which I arranged in five sections:

- informing patients
- clinic set-up
- safe practice
- professional conduct (it was impossible to exclude such matters)
- other general queries.

Four MBs in the south east were contacted and they all volunteered to read and answer the list of queries before I visited them during January and February. They had three, four, six and nine beds. Three of the MBs were by appointment only and one was a drop-in setting.

The Safe Practice queries included:

- ratio of practitioners to patients
- the number of patients treated at once
- whether the practitioner was alone with several patients
- the location of clean fields and sharps boxes
- secure storage of sharps
- whether the room was used for any other purpose.

In all cases the patients were immobile during treatment, either sitting or lying down. Regarding professional conduct it is essential that the consent form explains the mode of treatment in a MB. Then there are such matters as modesty and privacy including closeness of the beds, screens, blankets, gowns and whether conversations between practitioners and patients are confidential and not overheard. As with a private single-bed (SB) practice, the patient records must be securely stored. There was also the question of ownership of the patient records and responsibility for treatment when a different practitioner might be on duty.

Three of the four MBs were not permanent, meaning they had to clear away all the beds and equipment to allow the room to be used for other purposes, such as yoga on the floor. In my view, this would be a big incentive to keep hygiene and safe practice up to scratch! Three of the four had low background music playing and everybody conversed in whispers. Another three always provided initial and follow-up consultation in a separate private room. On a normal busy day one practitioner might see up to 15 patients, so unlike SB settings there is not the amount of time to talk to each patient. Overall I was most impressed by the safe practice at these clinics. It was hard to find safe practice issues which were specific to MBs and not SBs.

The aim of MBs is to provide acupuncture for those who would not

otherwise be able to afford it. The fees are approximately one third of the normal rate and treatment consists of acupuncture only; no herbs or massage. All of them were in 'poly' clinics that provided other therapies and had a full-time receptionist. One had only one practitioner and the others had two or more at a time. Three of the four were in old Victorian buildings with stairs and no wheelchair access and on busy streets; the other was more like a ground floor shop layout.

They all said the patients really like the MB clinic and that about 70 per cent of new patients had had acupuncture before. All the practitioners also had a private practice, in two instances in the same premises, but they also said that they very much enjoyed their days working MB.

I'd like to thank the 'good four', whose contact details are listed below, for all their help and information (they even let me take photos), and at this time ask any other multi-bedders amongst the membership to get in touch and give us your input. Please contact Ulrike Wirth at ulrike@acupuncture.org.uk or me, Belinda Coppock, directly at bmcoppock@talktalk.net

Details of the four multi-bed clinics

Dragon Acupuncture Project, Brighton

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or Nik Tilling

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Charlotte (Charlie) is currently setting up a website for MBs.

Bigroom Acupuncture, Oxford

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