

Bedale Osteopaths

Practice of the Year, 2023



With trust and quality valued over expansion, Bedale Osteopaths have seen practice life change much over the last two decades. Principal Suzanne Hibberd shares with us how they flourished from day one and why they chose to stay small rather than expand.

Serving villages

We are a small multidisciplinary clinic currently celebrating 22 years of offering osteopathy, acupuncture and massage in a small market town on the edge of the Yorkshire Dales. It's a rural community, so we primarily serve people from the surrounding dales and villages.

The practice was initially set up in 2002 with Stuart Bentley, a fellow osteopath whom I met when we were training at the BSO. A year after graduation, we found ourselves working together in a practice in Northallerton after both moved from London. There are very few osteopaths in the Dales, so we decided to set up in our local town above

a local health food shop. We fully expected to have just one or two afternoons a week in the new practice, but from day one, it flourished! We quickly found ourselves expanding to a larger premises and needing reception staff. Initially that was provided by my dad who came in every day voluntarily. He would chat with our patients and pencil the bookings into an A4 diary. Looking back at those early days, I realise how much practice life has changed – the patient journey was certainly quite different then. This rapid growth and success is a testament to our commitment and dedication to our patients and their health.

Top row left to right: Anna Blackwall, Suzanne Hibberd, Stuart Bentley, Katherine Alvarez, Felix Tongue

Bottom row left to right: Helen Storey, Nicola Rawstron, Sarah Hughes



Preference for smaller practice

In 2009 Stuart stepped down as a partner and became an associate and I took over the business. I have never liked parting with folks; once you are part of the team, I am loath to let you go!

I made a conscious decision some years ago not to keep on expanding to larger premises and more associates. I prefer a smaller practice with practitioners I know well and trust; most of us have worked together for over a decade, so we must be doing something right!

Caring for our patients

Patient care is at the heart of the practice. We try to ensure that every patient is cared for as thoroughly and competently as possible. We have an excellent admin team, which helps the patient journey and promotes trust from the outset.

In the early days, all our appointments were for half an hour, but we changed that several years ago to allow more time for the initial consultation. This works well and nurtures that initial patient relationship.

Prioritising patient communication

We try to ensure that patients feel heard and leave with optimism and the tools to help themselves. If we are unsure if we can help, we are open about that and we will either get more information or see if we can signpost a patient to someone who can help.

We use the Jane app - a great clinic software package that really helps with patient communication. It's a world away from our original set-up, and our patients love it as they can book online, get reminders, etc. Any patients who recommend our services will receive a referral voucher which is a fantastic way to show our appreciation to our patients.

A team approach

From day one, we took a team approach; Stuart and I would consult each other and share ideas. We have always nurtured strong bonds between our practitioners and staff. Laughter and fun are encouraged, and because so many of us have worked together for a long time, there is a trust there that is very special. As a team, we have attended various courses together, shared knowledge, and supported each other through treatment swaps and an informal mentoring approach. This team spirit has always been present, but I feel that this has strengthened over the past few years - In 2019, I had a breast cancer diagnosis, which, combined with the pandemic, meant that all in all, I had to have over a year off from treating patients. Fortunately, our most recent associate, Felix, joined Stuart and Anna, who worked to cover for my patients. My newly promoted practice manager, Sarah, stepped up and held the admin fort for me. It was an extremely turbulent period, but everyone worked hard to ensure patient care continued and I did not have to worry. I can never thank them enough for that support.



I prefer to have a smaller practice with practitioners that I know well and trust; most of us have now worked together for over a decade, so we must be doing something right!

Connected community

In a small, close-knit community like this, it's essential to maintain good social connections. We try to engage and share information about community events, support local fundraising and raffles, and promote local classes, other practitioners and local businesses. Sarah, my amazing practice manager, does most of the time-consuming running-the-business donkey work alongside Katherine, our receptionist. During the pandemic, Sarah and I spent literally hours updating our health and safety documents, which gave us the confidence to triage and reassure patients and again grow trust with our patients at that time. One of our biggest struggles in our practice is marketing and social media. We share the iO marketing posts, and I use a small team of people to help me with social media and graphic design from time to time. I was lucky enough to have some business enterprise coaching in the early days, which helped me understand more about marketing. But things constantly move on, and you have to keep up.

We initially said no to being nominated

One of our regulars saw the article in Osteopathy Today while waiting for her appointment. She suggested we apply and said she had voted for us. I initially said no; I looked at the criteria and did not think we ticked enough boxes. However, after being encouraged by my receptionist, I finally decided to join us. Writing the application was a beautiful way to reflect on the previous few years. It was fantastic to hear that we had reached the finals; our patients have been delighted by the news. Winning has definitely given us a bit more confidence, especially at a time when there seems to be so much negativity about being in our profession. We had so many positive endorsements from our patients, and it was fantastic to take the time to read their comments on the voting form. Realising that we have this kind of patient and community support has been amazing.

Winning has spurred us on

It's been very busy! We have benefited from press coverage in several local papers. We have spruced up the practice and our website. Winning has also spurred us to get some of those back-burner projects started. For example, it has fast-forwarded the development of a chronic pain service, which we hope to launch in the next month or two. I also hope to use it to strengthen our GP links, which are good but perhaps haven't been nurtured as much as they could have been post-COVID. For osteopaths thinking about entering the awards - go for it! We are proof that smaller quality-care clinics can win, which has already helped nurture our patients' trust and provided a great marketing boost!



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