Ever considered creating a virtual group with your colleagues?

Three osteopaths who have done just that offer practical tips for getting started

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This case study has been prepared to support osteopaths in relation setting up an online CPD group.

Get consent

The GOsC has been running webinars in which osteopaths have been trying out CPD activities that will meet the requirements of the new CPD scheme. One of the case-based discussion webinar groups found the experience so positive, they are continuing to run their own virtual group even after the conclusion of the GOsC facilitated sessions. They have started trying out other objective activities, making good progress with patient feedback. Sacha Babbage-Clark, Wendy Cooper and Mamta Narayan share their experiences of developing their virtual group.

Getting set up

Keen to stay in touch with each other once the GOsC webinars ended, and given that the colleagues they had met were based in different parts of the UK, Sacha explains that Skype was "the most obvious solution". The group nominates a leader for each session and meets at around 6pm for an hour. Agreeing a time that suits family and working life is important, and they find one hour is a manageable length of time. "It really isn't difficult to set up," explains Sacha. Having said that, the group did experience teething problems before their first meeting. Mamta explains: "We couldn't get Sacha onto the Skype call, so I ended up phoning her and putting her on speakerphone." Being new to Skype, the group now thinks they could have set up a brief trial run to sort out any problems, and to help them understand how the process would work, ensuring effective use of everyone's time on the day. Another useful learning point they have identified is to set goals for their meetings, finding their feet, the group hadn't got around to doing this for its first meeting, but recommend doing so.

Choosing an area of CPD

One interesting and useful topic for the group to focus on was patient feedback. They decided that this was something that none of them routinely do, but could be incorporated fairly easily into their practices. They are all "collecting data from the CARE measure," (www.caremeasure.org) and plan to compare their results later. A comparison of case-based discussions also proved interesting as group members treat different socio- economic groups in different parts of the UK. In terms of which CPD areas to discuss in the future, the group is going to take a flexible approach. Sacha says, "I think we will decide as we go along as we want to see how we get on with the first experiment".

An ideal way to fit in CPD with others

Pleased with how the group is going, Sacha says: "This is an ideal way to fit CPD with others into a busy life. I thoroughly enjoy discussing practice matters with the others and I look forward to our meetings". The feeling is that you don't need to be a technical wizard but only need to have "a small understanding of technology". And the group chose Skype because it was free but point out that you do need equipment to use it on. The other medium they had considered was FaceTime but not all the group had a Mac device. The answer is to choose whatever suits your group best. When asked about the potential of using an online group to carry out a peer discussion review, Mamta and Sacha thought this would work well, while Wendy had already made other arrangements. If you don't already have connections with other osteopaths Sacha recommends talking "to people on courses you go to, and if you get on, swap email addresses."