

Frequently Asked Questions

Non Therapeutic Physical Contact with Patients

8 May 2011

Is it ok to hug my patients?

The Board would encourage chiropractors to exercise significant caution about engaging in non-therapeutic physical contact with patients e.g. hugging, due to its non-therapeutic nature, the power differential in the relationship between patients and practitioners and the potential for misinterpretation particularly in situations where a practitioner is alone with a patient.

Different patients may have different attitudes and levels of comfort towards physical contact outside the therapeutic context, such as hugging as a form of greeting, including for cultural, social and gender reasons. The Code of Conduct reminds chiropractors that there is a power imbalance in the chiropractor-patient relationship, and consequently a need to ensure that all decisions are directly relevant to the clinical experience, and unaffected by non clinical motivations, such as affection for the patient. The Code of Conduct also emphasises the importance of maintaining professional boundaries, and engaging in activities such as hugging blurs these boundaries.

If you have any doubt about how a patient may react to a hug, it would be best to avoid this conduct, particularly when you are alone with a patient.

There may be legitimate therapeutic reasons for putting your arms around a patient, but in this context, your actions should have a clear clinical reason and be explained to the patient in advance.