

# **‘The Impact of Delivering Shiatsu in a General Practice’**

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## **Introduction**

Between 1999 and 2002 I conducted a PhD research study on the integration of a complementary medicine clinic in the National Health Service (NHS). It described the impact of delivering shiatsu on an inner-city general practice, its GPs, patients and the shiatsu practitioner.

## **Methods**

Practitioner research was conducted utilising a postpositivist, constructionist epistemology and predominantly qualitative methods. These methods were integrated using Cunningham’s (1998) Interactive Holistic Research (IHR) which includes action research. The qualitative findings were evaluated with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, 1995) and the quantitative data was assessed with a statistics package for the social sciences (SPSS).

## **Results**

### **Viability of the shiatsu clinic**

This study suggested that it is both viable and beneficial to deliver shiatsu in general practice. The Practice Manager provided a quiet room and space in the busy timetable of the general practice for the new shiatsu clinic. GPs successfully referred suitable patients for the shiatsu, the reception staff organised the appointments, integrating the shiatsu clinic into the existing appointment structures in the general practice and the patients not only attended their first appointment, but they all successfully attended each of their ten treatments and completed the research material.

## **Impacts of the shiatsu clinic**

### **Impact on the GPs**

The main impact of the shiatsu clinic on the general practice was that GP consultations with referred patients significantly reduced in terms of duration and frequency and involved fewer prescriptions for medication. GPs claimed that the clinic saved practice resources, offered greater options for care, increased their confidence in referrals to shiatsu, enhanced the reputation of the practice and encouraged a more holistic approach to health. Finally, the study also illustrated several benefits of complementary and orthodox practitioners working together to assist their professional development and enhance patient care.

### **Impact on the Patients**

The referred patients presented a complex mix of chronic physical and psychological/emotional symptoms. After having shiatsu, they claimed they experienced less pain, digestive disorders, stress, depression, anger and anxiety and more energy, immunity, relaxation and support. A cycle of improvement emerged that suggested how this was partly due to patients reassessing their health and adopting new behaviours to prevent and treat symptoms.

### **Impact on the Practitioner Researcher**

In this study, I was both the researcher and the complementary practitioner. The main impact of the shiatsu clinic on my role as practitioner researcher was the challenge of working with a new patient group in a new setting and the benefit of receiving detailed evaluation from the patients and GPs.

## **Conclusion**

This study has increased the research base for complementary medicine, specifically shiatsu, in primary care via an in-depth qualitative analysis of a single general practice. It found that a shiatsu clinic can be delivered within existing National Health Service structures. Furthermore, the study suggests how this shiatsu clinic beneficially impacted on its location and the people within it. These findings complement those in the existing literature to suggest recommendations for the future delivery and research of shiatsu in general practice.

