

**Retired member Jane Hurley has completed a project aimed at helping two students set up with support, and at the same time ensuring her home town retains a homeopathic practice. Here, she reports on the initiative.**

Last year an opportunity arose for me to set up a new joint clinic which combined my years of experience with the fresh knowledge of two final year students. I retired two years ago and myself and colleagues were worried Teignmouth would be left with no homeopaths.

After a lot of discussion and thought I wondered whether it would be possible to run a unique experiment which would include some of the ideas I had proposed when I ran continuing professional development practice management seminars but which I had not been able to put into practice myself.

During my time on the board of directors of the Society, I had been greatly concerned by the loss to the profession of good homeopaths, newly qualified as well as quite experienced ones, who never quite made a success of their practices. I knew that the burden of solo practice could be a heavy one, and combined with a lack of self confidence in the many skills required for success it was a sad inevitability that the many homeopaths struggled hard before giving up.

Although I did not want to go back into full-time practice I wondered whether a new joint practice would work, in which I could supervise two final year students for their last six months then leave them to run the clinic together after they graduated. There was a lot to consider, particularly whether the students' college would support the idea, how cases and finances would be shared, and perhaps most important of all, whether the idea would appeal to patients.

After discussions with colleague Clare Goodrick-Clarke, who was also about to retire, we agreed that she would gradually run down her practice and that all new patients would be referred to the joint clinic. If they were unwilling to be seen by a team of homeopaths we would refer them on to other local colleagues. We were incredibly lucky that the owner of the clinic supported the idea and, because she had been successfully treated by Miranda Castro years ago, provided more than half of our referrals.

I asked Mike Bridger at the Contemporary College of Homeopathy in Exeter whether he thought the idea could work and how we could enlist two of his final year students in such a way that their case supervision was not compromised. He was enormously supportive. To avoid any favouritism I invited the most local student to Teignmouth, Michelle Hiley, and her college friend, Lynne Chambers, to join the experiment.

This is what happened in the clinic:

- Lynne, Michelle and I ran the clinic every Wednesday morning
- Appointments cost £50 for one hour with half hour follow-ups at £25.
- We saw patients every two or three weeks whether they needed a prescription or not. This enabled us to build a good relationship with them and it greatly minimised the extra work created by phone calls between appointments.

- Although all three of us sat in the clinic together each patient was assigned to just one student for case-taking and ongoing management. At the end of case-taking the second student and I could ask more questions if appropriate.
- All three of us took case notes but for supervision purposes only one student submitted her fully worked out case. Joint discussion and remedy selection was kept to minimum until the students had graduated when they were able to confer together more.
- From the start I encouraged the students do everything themselves. Lynne devised a clever leaflet which had our photographs on the front and advertised the 3-4-1 (three homeopaths for the price of one) clinic. I provided remedies for the first few months but by graduation time the students had filled a mobile remedy case and bought a homeopathic computer programme.
- Financially I had no idea whether we would succeed or fail. We agreed that the students would share the room rental costs and I would take all patients' fees in lieu of supervision charges. It was a big outlay for the students and a gamble for me.

Shortly before the students graduated and I left them to run the clinic on their own, I sent a letter, questionnaire and s.a.e to our first twelve patients. I asked them to reply anonymously to me and encouraged them to be frank and open with their answers so that I could evaluate the project and also use their replies for student supervision. Ten patients replied with extremely positive responses. Nine of them, after initial apprehension, felt very happy and supported to be seen by three homeopaths. They were all surprisingly happy with the frequent follow-ups and all felt the clinic offered good value for money. Four of them would have liked a little bit more information about homeopathy and taking their remedies.

Perhaps the last word should go to the clinic owner. When I left the project I asked her for her comments and she said: "You wouldn't believe how easy it is to sell it to patients: the idea that they would get the attention of two or three homeopaths for the price of one and ongoing support from you if necessary after you've left the clinic." She was also enormously impressed "by the range of conditions Michelle and Lynne are willing to take on and their willingness to work with the patients' doctors and surgeons".

Perhaps this clinic could become a model for future practices so that students and newly qualified homeopaths had a reassuring start and experienced or retired homeopaths could pass on their support and acquired wisdom.

*If anyone would like to know more details about the clinic you are welcome to contact Jane at [jane.hurley@virgin.net](mailto:jane.hurley@virgin.net)*