

Reminder about claims made in your marketing materials

From STAT Council and the STAT Research Group

This October Council and the SRG jointly sent an email to remind teaching members about what can be claimed in marketing and promotional material. We thought it might be useful and easy to refer to this advice by publishing it in STATNews as well. We will take the word 'anxiety' as an example as it has become far more commonly used in everyday language and you may understandably be drawn to using language of the moment in your material.

Context

All claims that we make in our marketing materials about the effectiveness of taking Alexander lessons must be supported by reasonable evidence. In the case of claims made about the effectiveness for medically recognised health-related conditions, the evidence needs to be particularly strong and usually comes from randomised controlled clinical trials.

The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) is the UK's independent regulator of advertising across all media. They apply the Advertising Codes, which are written by the Committees of Advertising Practice (CAP). CAP has worked with the STAT Research Group (SRG) to agree what claims are likely to be acceptable and what are likely to be problematic when advertising the Alexander Technique. You can find CAP's advice regarding what can be claimed about the effectiveness of Alexander lessons using the link below.

<https://www.asa.org.uk/advice-online/health-alexander-technique.html>

Example: Claims around anxiety and stress

The word 'anxiety' has become a much-used term by the public during the past few years. But it is a term which can be problematic when it comes to what we may or may not claim.

For example, Generalised Anxiety Disorder is a recognised medical condition, and 'anxiety' is a recognised medical symptom. So, in the absence of clinical trial evidence, we're treading on very uncertain ground if we make claims about the effectiveness of Alexander lessons on 'anxiety'.

However, referring to potential benefits of Alexander lessons in relation to 'stress' may be more acceptable, partly because 'stress' is not usually defined as a medical condition. We believe it is likely that ASA CAP would not require such strong evidence needed to support claims about the effectiveness of lessons for stress. Furthermore, we do have research suggesting a beneficial effect of taking Alexander lessons on stress (Kinsey et al, 2021).

Similarly, performance-related anxiety is also not generally seen as a medical condition and we have preliminary evidence that suggests taking Alexander lessons may benefit people suffering from performance-related anxiety (Valentine et al, 1995).

Another area to consider is where you cite testimonials from your clients/pupils. We might sometimes receive feedback with comments such as 'I tend to feel less anxious at work than I used to'. It is difficult to give specific advice about how such information can be used in your marketing materials. However, do be aware that testimonials are generally not sufficient 'evidence' in themselves to support marketing claims. The ASA gives advice on the use of testimonials and endorsements at the link below.

<https://www.asa.org.uk/news/testimonials-and-endorsements.html>

So, when it comes to what to put on your websites and in other publicity material, remember there must be supporting evidence for any claims you make about the potential benefits of taking Alexander lessons – and that for any health-related condition, this usually means evidence from clinical trials. In the specific case of claims you may wish to make about effect of lessons on anxiety or stress, STAT (SRG) is advising using the term 'stress' and to avoid 'anxiety'.

References

1. Kinsey D., Glover L. & Wadehul F. (2021) How does the Alexander Technique lead to psychological and non-physical outcomes? A realist review. *European Journal of Integrative Medicine*, 46, 101371. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eujim.2021.101371>.
<https://alexandertechnique.co.uk/research/how-does-alexander-technique-lead-psychological-and-non-physical-outcomes-a-realist-review>
2. E. Valentine , D.F. Fitzgerald , T. Gorton , J. Hudson , E.R. Symonds. The effect of lessons in the Alexander technique on music performance in high and low stress situations, *Psychol. Music* 23 (1995) 129–141.
<https://alexandertechnique.co.uk/research/effect-lessons-alexander-technique-music-performance-high-and-low-stress-situations>