

Fact Sheet: Naturopathic Medicine

What is Naturopathic Medicine?

Naturopathic medicine is a distinct profession of primary health care physicians whose practitioners, while they make conventional disease diagnoses, are more oriented to prevention, education and promotion of optimal health and wellness rather than just treatment of disease. The following principles form the foundation of naturopathic medicine and are continually reexamined in light of current scientific advances.

- *First Do No Harm.* Preferred are the least invasive diagnostic procedures, treatments and medicinal substances with minimal risk of harmful side effects.
- *Prevention.* Physicians assess risk factors, make early interventions, and promote wellness by supporting patients to create healthy lifestyles.
- *The Healing Power of Nature.* Naturopathic medicine recognizes and encourages the inherent, ordered, and intelligent healing process in each individual.
- *Treatment of the whole person.* Physicians address the complex interactions of a patient's physical, emotional, mental, environmental, genetic, social and spiritual aspects.
- *Identification and treatment of the causes of disease.* Rather than merely eliminate symptoms, physicians identify and remove underlying causes of illness.
- *Doctor as Teacher.* The physician educates and develops patient self-responsibility, and the therapeutic potential of the doctor-patient relationship is valued and cultivated.

Naturopathic medicine integrates centuries-old knowledge of traditional, non-toxic therapies with the best of modern medical diagnostic science and standards of care. The scope of practice includes all aspects of family care, from natural childbirth to geriatrics.

History

The terms naturopathy and naturopathic medicine were coined in the late nineteenth century, but the roots of naturopathic medicine go back thousands of years. An eclectic system of healing, naturopathy draws on the healing wisdom of the world's

traditional cultures, including India (Ayurvedic), China (Taoist), and Greece (Hippocratic).

The first naturopathic professional medical societies were formed at the turn of the century, and medical conventions in the 1920's attracted more than 10,000 practitioners. At that time there were more than twenty medical colleges, and physicians were licensed in a majority of states.

After experiencing a decline in the 1940's and 50's due to the rising popularity of pharmaceutical drugs, technological medicine, and the theory that drugs could eliminate all disease, naturopathic medicine is experiencing a renaissance as a health conscious public turns to alternative treatment modalities. A national professional organization for naturopathic physicians was founded in the early 1980's, the American Association of Naturopathic Physicians, to promote the development of credible, science-based naturopathic medicine.

What is a Naturopathic Physician?

Naturopathic physicians are the only general practitioners of medicine trained in a wide variety of natural therapies. The U.S. Department of Labor defines the naturopathic physician as one who "diagnoses, treats, and cares for patients, using a system of practice that bases its treatment of all physiological functions and abnormal conditions on natural laws governing the body, utilizes physiological, psychological and mechanical methods, such as air, water, heat, earth, phytotherapy (treatment by use of plants), electrotherapy, physiotherapy, minor or orificial surgery, mechanotherapy, naturopathic corrections and manipulation, and all natural methods or modalities, together with natural medicines, natural processed foods, and herbs, and natural remedies..." Major surgery and the prescription of most drugs are excluded from naturopathic practice.

Education and Clinical Training

Naturopathic medical colleges are four-year professional schools with admission requirements comparable to those of conventional medical

schools. There are currently five schools in North America qualified to educate naturopathic physicians: Bastyr University School of Naturopathic Medicine, Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine, National College of Naturopathic Medicine, Southwest College of Naturopathic Medicine, and the newly founded University of Bridgeport College of Naturopathic Medicine. Other institutions have announced plans to start naturopathic medical programs.

Modern educational standards for naturopathic physicians became official when the Council on Naturopathic Medicine received recognition from the U.S. Department of Education in 1987. These standards involve completion of a pre-med education followed by a four-year residential curriculum with 4,500-5,000 hours of instruction. Basic medical science and clinical diagnostic skills are taught during the first two years. The core therapeutic curriculum includes instruction in acupuncture, nutritional sciences, counseling, botanical medicine, homeopathy, Oriental medicine, childbirth, physiotherapy, naturopathic manipulation, minor surgery, and other medical procedures. Students undergo extensive, supervised clinical training in outpatient naturopathic clinics, and there are a number of outpatient residency positions available for those desiring postgraduate training.

How Do Naturopathic Physicians Practice?

Most naturopathic doctors provide care through office-based, private practice. An increasing trend, particularly in the West, is the establishment of associate practices and interdisciplinary clinics, which bring together the services of a diverse group of practitioners. Referrals are made to other health care professionals, such as MD's, specialists, and chiropractors whenever appropriate.

Licensing

Graduates of approved programs are eligible to take the Naturopathic Physicians Licensing Exam. These exam results are currently being used for licensing purposes by eleven states (Alaska, Arizona, Connecticut, Hawaii, Maine, Montana, New

Hampshire, Oregon, Utah, Vermont and Washington) and five Canadian provinces (Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario and Saskatchewan).

Research

Naturopathic methods are well supported by scientific research drawn from peer-reviewed journals from many disciplines, including naturopathic medicine, conventional medicine, European complementary medicine, clinical nutrition, Oriental medicine, phytotherapy (herbal medicine), pharmacognosy, homeopathy, psychology and others. The two-volume *Textbook of Natural Medicine*, published by Bastyr University, cites over five thousand references in the scientific literature documenting the efficacy of naturopathic therapies. Information technology and new concepts in clinical outcomes assessment are particularly well suited to evaluating the effectiveness of naturopathic treatment protocols and are being used in research at naturopathic medical schools and in the offices of practicing physicians. Published research may be found in *The Journal of Naturopathic Medicine*.

The Future

Today's health care crisis, with its spiraling costs and the rising number of chronic, degenerative diseases too often unresponsive to current treatments, has stimulated the renewal of naturopathic medicine and traditionally-based alternative healing modalities. More and more people are choosing natural medicine for primary care or in conjunction with conventional treatment. Naturopathic medicine offers many documented short and long-term cost containment benefits and, with its emphasis on causation, prevention, health promotion and lifestyle changes, will play an important role in shifting our health care system from a disease to a wellness orientation.