

THE BENEFITS OF NATUROPATHIC CARE FOR FIREFIGHTERS

Access to naturopathic care is an emerging strategy for municipalities across the province to address the challenges in reducing firefighter injury and sick leave, supporting return to work, and extending firefighter careers.

Naturopathic Doctors (NDs) in Ontario are provincially regulated and highly trained, including a minimum of three years undergraduate pre-medical studies and four years of full-time clinical study at an accredited naturopathic college.

The expertise of Naturopathic Doctors includes:

- preventative care to address risk factors for firefighters, including cardio-vascular disease, hypertension and diabetes
- patient-centred care to promote the optimal health that can reduce the risk of injury
- naturopathic treatments to support rehabilitation, pain management, and return to work
- testing and early diagnosis of major diseases
- support for immune systems and energy levels in response to the challenges of shift work, environmental exposure to toxins, and work related stress

Increased interest in disease prevention and wellness, and more natural approaches to treatment reflect a major shift in people's attitudes toward their health. No longer is health the incidence or presence of disease, but a concept embracing physical, social and mental well-being. As people are taking a more active role in their health, they are also looking for more choice in the approach to care that is right for them. The trend in health care is that more people are interested in complementary care including Naturopathic Medicine and benefits providers are responding.

NDs have specialized expertise for the unique health concerns of firefighters. For example, naturopathic approaches to testing and treatment played an important role in addressing the complex health conditions among a group of 9/11 rescue workers at the World Trade Centre site.

With the leadership of the International Association of Fire Fighters, promoting wellness is an emerging priority for fire departments across North America, with clear evidence of benefits for both the employer and participating fire fighters. As a result, many Ontario municipalities are already providing benefits coverage for naturopathic care.

WHAT IS NATUROPATHIC MEDICINE?

The primary goal of naturopathic treatment is to address the cause of illnesses, rather than simply treating or suppressing symptoms; utilizing a patient-centred approach. NDs are highly trained to integrate standard medical diagnostics with a broad range of natural therapies and the use of therapeutic natural substances to promote better health and support and stimulate the body's ability to heal itself.

Naturopathic care is highly patient-centered and focused on treating the whole person. The longer length of appointments strongly contributes to the success of naturopathic care, in particular prevention strategies and the early identification of disorders. NDs place a strong emphasis on lifestyle counseling, dietary modification and the education and empowering of patients to take charge of their health.



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Treatments used in Naturopathic Medicine can include the integrated use of clinical nutrition, botanical or herbal medicines, Asian medicine and acupuncture, homeopathic medicine, physical therapies, lifestyle counseling, and advanced injection therapies used to treat chronic pain, immune disorders, fatigue and systemic toxicity from chemicals or heavy metals. Naturopathic protocols are based on research and study, with an increasing body of evidence showing the scientific basis and validity of naturopathic approaches to health promotion and treatment.

Naturopathic Medicine closely parallels the training of those who will become MDs. This includes the pre-requisite of three years of undergraduate pre-med education and a four-year Naturopathic Medicine program focused on preparing clinicians for the challenges of primary care practice.

NDs are specifically trained to collaborate with other health care practitioners and have clear standards of practice. There is a North American wide-system of accreditation for educational institutions that includes a standard curriculum and standardized examination.

Established in 1950, the Ontario Association of Naturopathic Doctors (OAND) provides leadership, advocacy, and support for the profession in Ontario. At present the OAND has over 600 professional members and approximately 400 student members. The OAND represents over 75% of Ontario's actively practicing NDs. In 2008, NDs provided care to an estimated 100,000 Ontarians.

HOW ARE NDs REGULATED?

The *Naturopathy Act*, passed in 2007, moves the regulation of NDs from the *Drugless Practitioners Act* to join all other regulated health professions under the *Regulated Health Professions Act* with a clear scope of practice and controlled acts. NDs have been regulated under the DPA for over 80 years and are the only profession currently exempted from the restriction on Controlled Acts under the *RHPA*. The *Naturopathy Act* confirms most of the current scope of practice.

COVERAGE APPROACH

The comprehensive approach of naturopathic care, focused on prevention and the diagnosis and treatment of underlying causes of disease and disorder require longer appointment times than some other health professions. The intake assessment may take 1 to 1.5 hours and subsequent appointments are typically 20 to 30 minutes. As a result, it is preferable to use a health accounts approach to funding naturopathic care, with an adequate annual cap or a per visit maximum claim of \$250 for the initial visit and \$100 for subsequent visits.

Naturopathic coverage should also include required lab testing and could also include prescribed substances used in naturopathic treatments.

Regulated NDs are also authorized to perform acupuncture. Beneficiaries should be able to claim reimbursement for acupuncture treatments received from NDs.

CONCLUSION

The OAND can provide direct support in the development of a program to include coverage of naturopathic care for firefighters, including condition-specific treatment protocols related to key health and wellness concerns. Access to comprehensive naturopathic care can play a central role in supporting cost-effective strategies to reduce injury and illness and extend the career of Toronto firefighters.

For more information please contact Michael Heitshu, Director of Policy at policy@oand.org or at 416-233-2001 x. 27. You can find out more about Naturopathic Medicine including a referral to an ND near you at www.oand.org.