



Naturopathic Medicine: An Overview of the Profession

Naturopathic Medicine is a well-established health profession in Ontario. The profession has been regulated here since the 1920's and with almost 900 Naturopathic Doctors (NDs), Ontario has the most NDs in North America.

With the growing interest in a more natural approach to health, new regulation of the profession with the 2007 *Naturopathy Act*, and a continuing search for new solutions to meet Ontario's health challenges, NDs are poised to become an increasingly important part of Ontario's health care system.

What is Naturopathic Medicine?

The primary goal of naturopathic treatment is to look beyond symptoms to also address the root cause of illnesses. 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 counselling, dietary modification and the education and empowering of patients to take charge of their health. 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 and lifestyle counselling.

Training and Education

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.

NDs and the Health Care System

NDs fit very well with the provincial vision for a transformed health care system, especially in a time of increasing doctor shortages. Naturopathic Doctors are already improving access to primary care, with a strong focus on prevention.

The 2007 *Naturopathy Act* moves the regulation of NDs from the *Drugless Practitioners Act* into the *Regulated Health Professions Act*. If NDs are able to preserve their scope in this transition and work to the full scope of their training and capabilities, NDs will be able to relieve pressure on other providers and Emergency Rooms by avoiding unnecessary transfers of care, and increase their contribution to the chronic disease framework.

The key issue still to be addressed is prescribing authority so that NDs can maintain access to restricted natural substances they are currently using, and obtain new access to substances they are trained and capable of using in providing primary care to their patients.

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