

Naturopathic doctors are already providing safe, quality healthcare services to millions of Ontarians who are taking charge of their health.

Naturopathic doctors (NDs) practice a unique and comprehensive approach to preventing disease, improving health and treating illness; they integrate standard medical diagnostics with a broad range of natural therapies. NDs support and stimulate the body's ability to heal itself, focusing on prevention and using natural substances and treatments.

The primary goal of naturopathic treatment is to address the cause of illnesses, rather than simply treating or suppressing symptoms. In other words, NDs concern themselves with the "why" as well as with the "what" of an illness or disease. Because of the patient-centred approach to care and the need to understand the underlying cause of health problems, visits with an ND are typically much longer than those with a medical doctor.

Following a diagnosis, 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. NDs also emphasize prevention and health promotion through lifestyle and nutritional counselling.

NDs are trained to understand both natural and conventional therapies, allowing them to help other practitioners and patients in the safe use of natural therapies. NDs are also trained to provide early diagnosis and treatment of many serious diseases and they are trained to identify the conditions that would result in a referral of a patient to other healthcare providers.

Naturopathic medicine has a well established history. In fact, the Greek root of the word "physician" means "the science of nature". It is a time-honoured profession that continues to evolve and grow. Naturopathic diagnosis and treatments are supported by an increasing body of evidence-based research. Clinical research into natural therapies has become an increasingly important focus for the profession.

NDs offer an important choice in Ontario's healthcare system. In recent years, a health-conscious public has sought out alternatives to conventional medicine, leading to a resurgence of the profession. Patients are drawn to the more personal approach and support NDs offer to those looking to take charge of their health.

NDs are increasingly able to take pressure off family doctors and hospitals by offering alternative avenues for primary healthcare and by promoting healthy lifestyles. NDs help save the system money, without compromising in any way – in fact, improving – the public's access to top quality healthcare services.

Additionally, NDs fit very well with the provincial vision for a transformed healthcare system. NDs are community-based and many are already organized into practice groups with MDs, acupuncturists, chiropractors, massage therapists and other healthcare providers. With improved regulation, NDs will be able to reach their full potential as partners in primary healthcare and illness prevention.

In Ontario in December 2006:

- There are 838 registered NDs and most belong to the Ontario Association of Naturopathic Doctors (OAND), which represents the men and women practicing naturopathic medicine in this province.
- The profession is currently regulated under the *Drugless Practitioners Act (DPA)*, an antiquated, ineffective piece of legislation that does not provide protection to either the public or the profession. NDs strongly support joining other primary healthcare providers – from physicians and nurses to chiropractors and massage therapists – that are regulated under *Regulated Health Professions Act (RHPA)*.
- The *RHPA* offers modern and effective rules that provide many important public protections, including assurance that their healthcare provider meets educational, training and practice standards. NDs are the only health professionals still governed by the *DPA*.
- To register in Ontario, NDs must undergo at least seven years of formal post-secondary education and rigorous and broad training:
 - They must have successfully completed at least three years of university pre-medical sciences from a recognized university; most have at least one undergraduate degree at a recognized university.
 - They must complete four years of fulltime naturopathic medicine education, which includes 1,500 hours of clinical practice at an accredited college.
 - They must pass the regulatory board exams, which include the North American standards and the Ontario standards for naturopathic medicine.
 - They must continue their education throughout their careers to remain in good standing with the regulator.