



EDITORIAL

What is naturopathic physical medicine?

Naturopathic medicine is a worldwide health-care profession, currently in resurgence, with concentrations in the US, Germany, Canada, UK, Australia, and India. In these countries, naturopathic medicine functions, or is legally defined, as a primary health care profession, whose practice incorporates health promotion and the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of acute and chronic disease. There are marked scope of practice and training differences between various regional and global traditions.

In the USA and Canada, consistent with naturopathic principles of practice, naturopathic doctors (NDs) are trained as general practice family physicians. NDs (and practitioners in countries where licensing and scope of practice is not as full as in those North American States and Provinces, where a full medical license prevails) are trained to assess and treat disease from a whole person perspective, taking into account not only the presenting pathology, but deeper causes, and collateral relationships with other systems of the body, involving biochemical, biomechanical and psychosocial influences (Standish et al., 2005).

The training and scope of practice of licensed naturopathic physicians in the USA and Canada includes the use of physical medicine.

Naturopathic practice may include the following diagnostic and treatment modalities: utilization of all methods of clinical and laboratory diagnostic testing including diagnostic radiology and other imaging techniques; nutritional medicine, dietetics and therapeutic fasting; medicines of mineral, animal and botanical origin; hygiene and public health measures; naturopathic physical medicine (NPM) including naturopathic manipulative therapies; the use of water, heat, cold, light, electricity, air, earth, electromagnetic and mechanical devices, ultrasound, and therapeutic exercise; homeopathy; acupuncture; psycho-

therapy and counselling; minor surgery and naturopathic obstetrics: (natural childbirth). Naturopathic practice specifically excludes major surgery and the use of most synthetic drugs (Snider and Zeff, 1989).

International perspectives on naturopathic practice and principles demonstrate increasing coherence and consistency between North America, Australia and the United Kingdom, as evidenced by a recent publication in which naturopathic medicine is described as, “the eclectic, and integrative practice of health care, united by the core underlying principles (and their applied clinical theory)”. Central to these principles is *the healing power of nature (vis medicatrix naturae)*, a concept that is ascribed to Hippocrates, and which is as old as the healing arts. This refers to the inherent self-organizing and healing process of living systems that establishes, maintains and restores health (aka homeostasis) (Myers et al., 2003).

In the words of Newman Turner (1984): “Naturopathy is based on the recognition that the body possesses not only a natural ability to resist disease, but inherent mechanisms of recovery and self-regulation.” Naturopathic medicine bases its clinical theories and reasoning, as evidenced by its therapeutic choices, on assisting the self-regulation processes, by means of removing obstacles to recovery, and/or enhancing the functionality of systems, organs and tissues.

Orrock (2006) has outlined the nature of NPM as follows:

“Naturopathic Physical Medicine:

- is the practice of physical medicine in the context of naturopathic medicine;
- integrates both scientific knowledge in physical medicine and the principles of naturopathic medicine into a distinct approach to physical medicine practice.

Core components of NPM include:

- a respect for the traditional and empirical naturopathic approach to knowledge of the physical (structural and biomechanical) aspect of the human being in health and disease;
- the value of individualization of therapy and constitutional needs;
- a concentration on holistic diagnosis and the interaction of all systems;
- the general therapeutic goal of stimulation of the body's self regulating systems and mechanisms, as well as reduction of adaptive demands;
- education, self-care and prevention.”

A recent Canadian survey (Verhoef et al., 2006) offers insights into current naturopathic training.

In addition to studying botanical (herbal) medicine, homeopathy, Traditional Chinese Medicine—including acupuncture, nutrition and lifestyle counselling, the physical methods of treatment incorporated into Naturopathic training in the USA and Canada include: Naturopathic manipulation, massage, manual lymphatic drainage, acupressure, craniosacral therapy, Alexander technique, Polarity therapy, hydrotherapy and electrotherapy.

Subsequent issues of JBMT will include papers that reflect naturopathic uses of physical methods, common to other branches of manual medicine.

References

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