

A new medical profession that offers benefits is naturopathy. Naturopathy is a type of healthcare that emphasizes natural items and processes to heal a patient. This idea has gained traction in a number of states because of the low-cost alternatives that naturopathy provides to patients. By creating other treatment options for patients, naturopathy helps with crowding at other healthcare providers, allowing more patients to be seen.

Naturopathy focuses on a key set of concepts that help distinguish it from conventional medicine. First, naturopathy promotes and focuses on the healing power of nature. Second, naturopathic practitioners focus on treatments that minimize side effects and not suppressing symptoms. Third, naturopathic practitioners believe that health is related to many factors (specifically, physical, mental, emotional, genetic, environmental, and social), and all need to be considered to design the optimal treatment. Fourth, naturopathic practitioners seek to find the cause of a disease rather than fighting its symptoms. Because naturopathic practitioners believe symptoms are merely the body's way of trying fight or recover from a disease, they choose to emphasize the cause. Fifth, naturopathic practitioners believe that prevention is the best cure, and teach methods of healthy living to prevent sickness. Lastly, naturopathic practitioners may view themselves as teachers, educating their patients on methods and ways to healthy living.

Naturopathic practitioners usually use a series of different treatments to aid their patients. The first step is an extended meeting between the naturopathic practitioner and the prospective patient. During this meeting, the naturopathic practitioner will essentially interview the patient, mostly about their health, reason for the visit, and other aspects of their life. Certain tests may be performed, with the naturopathic practitioner trying to discern the health level of the patient.

Potential treatments can include dietary changes, herbal medicine, hydrotherapy, exercise therapy, yoga and meditation (among many others). With these treatments however, there are a series of risks. The main ones are that naturopathy is not a complete substitute for conventional medical care. There is evidence that some procedures done by conventional practitioners can be substituted by procedures done by naturopathic practitioners. There are certain procedures, however, for which no substitutes exist. Also, some procedures have the potential to be harmful if not supervised or if used in addition to conventional medications. In addition, some practitioners of naturopathy do not recommend vaccinations for children, which may put individuals at risk. Lastly, education for naturopathic practitioners can vary, with a number of different procedures and treatments being taught.

As of July 2, 2009, 15 states (and the District of Columbia) have licensing laws for Naturopathic Physicians (for reference, see the excel spreadsheet). Examples of states include California, Hawaii, Minnesota, Oregon, and Vermont. A number of other states have specific regulations or mention naturopathic practitioners in their laws. The real benefit to regulating naturopathic practitioners is that it allows citizens access to another form of low-cost healthcare. In research, a

large amount of the problems and risks associated with naturopathic medicine are because of the lack of regulation. If practitioners are to be allowed, some form or standard has to be set by the state in order to ensure that (relatively) safe treatments are being administered. (All information for this essay was found on the websites provided on the "Links for Naturopathy" document).