

## What is Naturopathic Medicine? by Suzanne Tang, N.D., L.Ac.

Naturopathic medicine is a comprehensive and distinct system of medicine that aims to restore and optimize health by promoting the body's own inherent ability to heal with the use of natural therapies. The practice of naturopathic medicine is guided by six important principles. Naturopathic medicine understands illness as a disruption to the normal orderly function or equilibrium. Healing is considered as a return to this equilibrium of health. Naturopathic doctors seek to restore this equilibrium by encouraging the primary practice principle, the healing power of nature or *vis medicatrix naturae*. Naturopathic doctors are trained to utilize the least invasive therapies first and avoid using interventions that could further disrupt the equilibrium of health. This fundamental principle of naturopathic medicine is known as first do no harm also called *primum non nocere*. Naturopathic medicine understands that illness can be caused by numerous underlying causes such as dietary and lifestyle factors. Naturopathic doctors are trained to identify and treat the cause, *tolle causam* to help patients restore their equilibrium and recover from their illnesses. In addition, naturopathic doctors are taught to treat the whole person or *tolle totum* by comprehensively addressing the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual factors that can affect a patient's overall health. While addressing the obstacles to health, naturopathic doctors are teachers (*docere*) educating and motivating patients to take responsibility for their well-being. Finally, naturopathic medicine truly supports the old adage "an ounce of *prevention* is worth a pound of cure". Naturopathic doctors identify risk factors to disease and offer patients appropriate treatment interventions to prevent illness.

Naturopathic doctors are trained at accredited, four-year, post-graduate medical schools. The naturopathic medical training is based on the six fundamental principles along with rigorous and comprehensive studies in basic medical sciences, physical diagnosis, laboratory testing, diagnostic imaging studies, pharmacology, and clinical medical sciences. There is also extensive training in a variety of natural therapeutics that includes clinical nutrition, herbal medicine, dietary, lifestyle, and fitness counseling, homeopathy, naturopathic bodywork and physical medicine. Many naturopathic doctors receive additional training in disciplines such as midwifery, acupuncture and Oriental medicine, homeopathy, psychotherapy, and Ayurvedic medicine. Naturopathic doctors are required to complete a two-year intensive clinical training and pass a national basic science and clinical board exam to be licensed. Licensure allows naturopathic doctors to practice as independent doctors and authorizes them to diagnose, treat, and prevent disease. As of October, 2003, naturopathic doctors are licensed as health care providers in Alaska, Arizona, California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Kansas, Maine, Montana, New Hampshire, Oregon, Utah, Vermont, Washington and the U.S. territories of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

The time-tested naturopathic principles and practices are integrated with the latest advances in medical science. Naturopathic diagnosis and therapeutics are supported by scientific research drawn from peer-reviewed journals from many disciplines.

Naturopathic doctors spend time listening to the patient's concerns to obtain an in-depth understanding of the patient's underlying condition. Potential underlying causes of the patient's illness are identified by extensively reviewing the patient's diet, sources of stress, energy level, digestion, exercise, lifestyle, past and present medical history, and

family history. Physical examinations appropriate to the patient's concerns are performed and the latest standards in diagnostic examination and laboratory testing are employed. Naturopathic doctors can effectively treat patients with a variety of symptoms and conditions, such as cold and flu, allergies, fatigue, digestive problems, menopausal symptoms, chronic pain, cardiovascular disease and high blood pressure. Treatment plans utilizing numerous natural therapies are tailored to the patient's health status and individual needs.

With the public interest and demand for integrative medical care, naturopathic medicine is currently being offered at 20 conventional hospitals and numerous integrated clinics.