



Naturopathic Medicine plays credible complementary role in improving Canadians' health

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Canada's Naturopathic Doctors (NDs) are trained to address the fundamental causes of disease, treating the whole person through an individualized approach with a particular focus on prevention and wellness.

NDs provide care to patients that is complementary, not “alternative” to conventional medicine. They do not hold a “philosophical aversion” to science, surgery or pharmaceuticals.

Yet, this is not the conclusion one reaches after reading a National Post article entitled [Naturopathy is poised to 'disrupt' health-care status quo, proponents of controversial practice say](#), first published on September 27, 2019. The Canadian Association of Naturopathic Doctors (CAND) was not contacted to provide information or perspective for the piece.

The National Post article in question uses a [recent academic article](#) published in *Medicina*, a peer-reviewed scientific journal, as an opportunity to characterize the field of naturopathic medicine as “controversial”, “supernatural” “nonsense”.

We strongly challenge this characterization and maintain that the “evidence” used to support these unfair claims is incomplete, one-sided and lacking in journalistic integrity.

The *Medicina* article states that naturopathy has the potential to be a “disruptive innovation in health care.” In laymen's terms, this means that using naturopathic medicine as a regular and systematic “first step” in health care could help divert those patients away from the conventional health system who do not need it – reducing costs and reallocating medical resources more effectively to better serve patients with the greatest need.

It is not “controversial” to want to improve health outcomes for Canadians by increasing the focus on prevention through closer collaboration between conventional and complementary health care professionals.

Indeed, the World Health Organization (WHO) has identified Traditional and Complementary Medicine (T&CM) – which includes naturopathic medicine – [in a 2019 report](#) as “an important and often underestimated health resource with many applications, especially in the prevention and management of lifestyle-related chronic diseases.”



In that report, the WHO Director General states that T&CM “would be an option offered by well-functioning, people-centered health systems that balances curative services with preventive care.”

The WHO regards T&CM, including naturopathic medicine, as a credible and realistic approach to eliminating health care inequality and achieving [sustainable health care for all as a human right](#).

Despite this international recognition, the National Post article further attempts to dismiss NDs for apparently claiming “ownership” of preventative health.

Acknowledging that naturopathic medicine emphasizes a healthy lifestyle as a core preventative principle in no way negates the role of diet and exercise in conventional medical practice. Further, we would never purport that NDs are the owners of preventative health or that NDs “invented” the concepts of good diet and exercise as the article suggests.

To the contrary, that both MDs and NDs place high value on healthy lifestyles indicates the two professions are well-aligned on preventative health as evidenced by many successful collaborations between Canadian MDs and NDs on individual patient teams, combining and optimizing their respective expertise for the ultimate benefit of the patient.

Beyond incorrectly portraying naturopathic and conventional medicine as fundamentally in tension, we also take serious issue with the way in which the National Post article points to the tragedy of Ezekiel Stephan’s death as an indictment of NDs at large.

Let us be clear: David Stephan is not a naturopathic doctor. He and his wife did not use naturopathic medicine to treat their son nor did they bring their sick child to see an ND in person.

By all accounts, the ND involved acted ethically and responsibly in advising over the phone that the Stephans immediately take Ezekiel to hospital – advice they did not follow. The ND’s professional conduct is clear to anyone with a basic understanding of the events of this case, so much so that she acted as a material witness for the *prosecution* in David and Collet Stephan’s original trial and subsequent retrial.

The National Post article fails to include these important details, instead erroneously suggesting the ND was at fault and that David Stephan’s extremist views are somehow representative of our profession. This could not be further from the truth.



Finally, we contest claims made in the National Post article that anti-vaccine rhetoric “isn’t uncommon among naturopaths.” This is patently false.

The CAND and its members support public health policy. The importance of childhood immunization is taught within the curriculum of accredited naturopathic medical programs and students must meet clinical competencies for immunization education in order to graduate.

Where immunization is within the regulated scope of practice for NDs, as in British Columbia, NDs certified to provide immunizations must follow the same BC Centre for Disease Control course and guidelines as other immunizers in the province.

In conclusion, NDs provide patients with the best advice possible based on their education and training. They are strong advocates for an integrative approach to health that works in conjunction with conventional medicine – not displaces it.

We are all reaching for the same goals: improved health and wellness and better access to care for all Canadians. At CAND, we believe NDs and MDs have an opportunity to work with one another in this endeavor and hope that future articles about our profession will contribute honestly and meaningfully to this discourse.

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