



SCOPE OF PRACTICE – NATUROPATHIC PROVIDERS

AAFP Position

The AAFP believes that naturopathic theory and practice are not based upon knowledge widely accepted by the scientific community. Naturopathic education does not prepare practitioners to properly and accurately diagnose or provide appropriate treatment, safely or effectively prescribe medications, perform physicals for school or employment, or perform surgical procedures. The AAFP opposes an expansion of naturopaths' scope of practice in the 20 states and DC that provide licensing for naturopathic practitioners. A naturopath must not be allowed, under any circumstances, to use the title "physician," nor should a naturopath be considered a "primary care physician."

Education and Training

There are significant differences between family physicians and naturopaths in both training and education. Family physicians receive their education through a four-year degree program at one of the 183 accredited allopathic or osteopathic medical schools in the United States. Students must pass the Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT) for entrance into medical school and spend nearly 9,000 hours in lectures, clinical study, lab and direct patient care.^{1,2}

Most family medicine residency programs require three years of clinical training and have specific requirements that must be met, such as a demonstrated competency in diagnosis and management and direct experiences in patient care, before students are eligible for board certification. Residency programs are designed to provide integrated experiences in ambulatory, community and inpatient environments over three years of concentrated study and hands-on training.³

Naturopathic education is completed through a four-year degree program that confers a Doctor in Naturopathy (ND) or Doctorate in Naturopathic Medicine (NMD). Currently, there are only six naturopathic education institutions in the United States. These schools do not require an entrance exam, such as the MCAT or Graduate Records Examination (GRE), for admission.

Naturopathic instruction totals 4,100 hours which includes coursework in areas such as homeopathy and botanical medicine and requires at least 1,200 hours of clinical education, with a minimum of 850 hours in direct patient care. Graduates of naturopathic degree programs are not required to undergo the same post-graduate residency training expected of medical school graduates; however, some naturopathic institutions offer an optional one-year residency program.⁴

Regulation and Scope of Practice

The regulation of the practice of naturopathy varies from state to state. Both South Carolina and Tennessee explicitly prohibit the practice of naturopathy, while 20 states and DC (see map, next page) have laws that license naturopathic providers. To receive a license to practice naturopathic medicine in those 20 states and DC, practitioners are required to graduate from an accredited four-year residential naturopathic school and pass a postdoctoral board examination. Licensed naturopathic providers must fulfill state-mandated continuing education requirements annually and follow a specific scope of practice defined by their state's law.⁵

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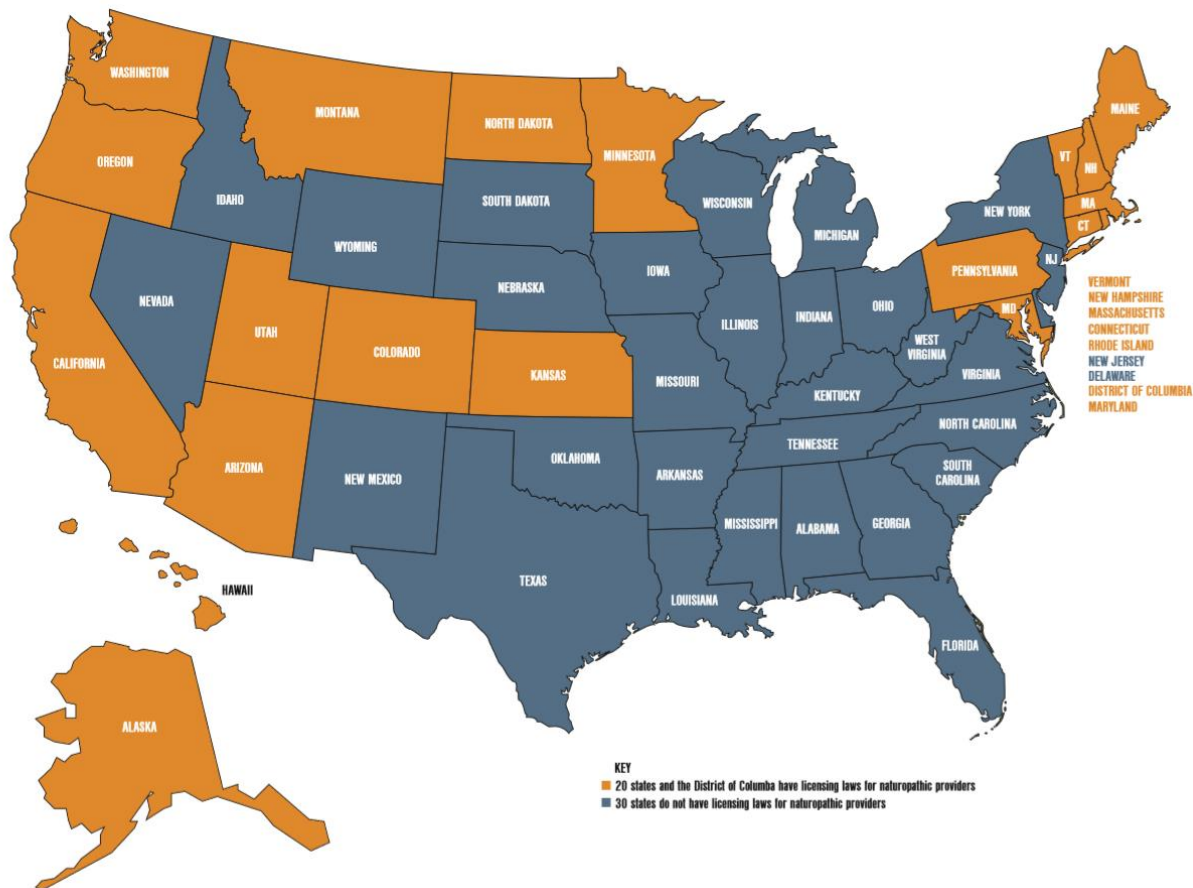
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State laws regarding the practice of naturopathy address prescribing authority, surgical authority, the ability to order tests, and use of the term “physician.” While most states allow for naturopathic providers to have prescribing authority, they are not allowed to prescribe controlled substances aside from New Hampshire and Washington, which both allow limited exceptions for certain drugs.^{6,7} The majority of states allow a naturopath to prescribe and administer nonprescription natural therapeutic substances, drugs and therapies.⁸

Aside from prescribing authority, the extent of what licensed naturopathic providers can do differs widely among states. Twelve states (CA, CO, HI, KS, ME, MN, MA, MT, NH, OR, UT, and VT) and DC allow naturopaths to provide minor surgeries. While definitions of minor surgeries vary, they typically refer to the repair, care and suturing of superficial lacerations and abrasions and the removal of foreign bodies located in superficial tissue.⁹ Additionally, 11 states (CA, CO, MA, MD, ME, MN, MT, ND, NH, UT, and VT) allow naturopathic providers to order diagnostic tests. Finally, seven states (AZ, HI, MA, MT, OR, UT, and VT) allow naturopathic providers to use the term “physician;” however, this is expressly prohibited in seven states (AK, CA, CO, KS, MD, ME, and ND) and DC.¹⁰



¹ “About the AAMC.” Association of American Medical Schools. Web.

² “U.S. Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine.” American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine. Web.

³ “Typical Medical School Curriculum.” Study.com. Web.

⁴ “The Curriculum.” Association of Accredited Naturopathic Medical Colleges. Web.

⁵ “Regulated States & Regulatory Authorities.” American Association of Naturopathic Physicians. Web.

⁶ N.H.R.S.A. § 328-E:4

⁷ R.C.W. § 18.36A.020

⁸ N.D.C.C. § 43-58

⁹ C.R.S. § 12-37.3-105

¹⁰ “State law chart: Naturopathic licensure and scope of practice.” American Medical Association. Web.