



SCOPE OF PRACTICE – NATUROPATHIC PROVIDERS

RECOMMENDATION:

The American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) believes that naturopathic theory and practice are not based upon the body of knowledge related to health, disease, and health care that has been accepted widely by the scientific community. The scope and quality of naturopathic education does not prepare naturopathic practitioners to properly and accurately diagnose or provide appropriate treatment. In states that license naturopaths, the AAFP opposes an expansion of naturopaths' scope of practice. The AAFP believes that naturopathic education and training do not prepare naturopaths to safely or effectively prescribe medications, perform physicals for school or employment, or perform surgical procedures. A naturopath must not be allowed, under any circumstances, to use the title "physician," nor should a naturopath ever be considered a "primary care physician."

Education and Training

There are significant differences between family physicians and naturopaths in training and education. Family Physicians receive their education through a four-year degree program at one of the 175 accredited allopathic or osteopathic medical schools in the United States. Students must pass the Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT) for entrance into medical school. Medical students spend nearly 9,000 hours in lectures, clinical study, lab and direct patient care. The overall training process begins with medical school and continues through residency.

Most family medicine residency programs, which are accredited by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME), require three years of clinical training. As with other specialties, family medicine residency programs have specific requirements with certain numbers of hours and patient care experiences that must be completed for board certification eligibility. Residency programs are designed to provide integrated experiences in ambulatory, community and inpatient environments during three years of concentrated study and hands-on training.

Naturopathic education is through a four-year degree program that confers a Doctor in Naturopathy (ND) or Doctorate in Naturopathic Medicine (NMD). Currently, there are six institutions in the United States accredited by the Council on Naturopathic Medical Education (CNME), which is the only naturopathic accrediting organization recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. Naturopathic schools do not require an entrance exam, such as the MCAT or Graduate Records Examination (GRE), for admission.

The CNME requires the naturopathic course of study provided at their accredited institutions be 4,100 total hours in length. The program's clinical education component requires at least 1,200 hours, and a minimum of 850 hours must be in direct patient care. Graduates of naturopathic degree programs are not required to undergo post-graduate training, unlike the residency required of medical school graduates. Some institutions offer an optional one year residency program.

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