

Naturopath / Naturopathic Doctor Q&A

The naturopathic profession has existed as a recognized profession for over a century and is currently practiced in over 90 countries. The WNF recognizes that the naturopathic profession globally is diverse especially as it relates to educational accreditation standards and political recognition in the various countries. The WNF respects the diversity of the profession and encourages professional collaboration on all levels.

Terms used in the naturopathic profession are strongly influenced by the political and regulatory landscape in each country and by the history and development of the naturopathic profession within a country. The following Q&A is designed to provide clarification on two of the main titles used within the profession - naturopath and naturopathic doctor.

Q: What is the main difference between a naturopath and a naturopathic doctor?

A: The term naturopath is the original term used to describe a practitioner within the naturopathic profession. The term naturopathic doctor is used in some regions of the world, generally to describe a naturopathic practitioner that has completed a more extensive naturopathic educational program and that practices in a region where the title “naturopathic doctor” is permitted in the regulation of the naturopathic profession in that area.

Q: Is there any difference in the naturopathic principles, philosophy or theories that are taught to naturopaths or naturopathic doctors?

A: The naturopathic profession has a strong history and tie to its principles, philosophies and theories. Based on the global surveys conducted by the WNF in 2015 and 2016, the six naturopathic principles are consistent across all naturopathic programs and across all countries. Also, in 83% of the naturopathic programs, naturopathic principles and philosophy are taught either as a stand-alone module or they are both stand-alone and integrated into other aspect of the naturopathic curriculum.

Although there is some variation in naturopathic philosophies and theories, there is a core group that is consistent across naturopathic programs and countries. The core naturopathic philosophies and theories Vital Force (vis vitalis) / Theory of Vitality, Integration of the Individual - spiritual, psychological, functional, structural (Mind, Body, Spirit) and Naturopathy Cures - detoxification, revitalization, stabilization and regeneration were taught in 96% of the programs; Value of Fever 89%; Therapeutic Order 85%; Naturopathic Triad of Health and Unity of Disease 81%; Hering's Law of Cure and Theory of Toxemia 78%; Humoral Theory 74%; and Theory of Complex Systems and Emunctories / Emunctory Theory were taught in 67% of the programs.

Please check out the WNF survey reports for more detailed information.

Q: Is there any difference in what is taught in the different naturopathic programs.

A: 100% of all naturopathic programs include the core components of basic sciences; clinical sciences; naturopathic history, philosophy, principles and theories; naturopathic disciplines and all programs include a practical clinical component.

The differences occur in the number of hours that each program spends in each component. The variation is based on the length of program, the current regulatory and political environment in each country and the geographical area.

Q: Is there any difference in how a naturopath or naturopathic doctor diagnoses or assesses patients?

A: All naturopathic programs teach diagnosis and assessment. Those diagnostic methods essential to primary care and adequate diagnostic skills – clinical assessments and physical exams were included in 88% and 86% respectively of all programs. Some core diagnostic methods, such as physical exams and laboratory testing were reported to be limited in some regions due to government regulations. High consistency was shown in clinical assessment (standard medical assessment including auscultation, palpation, percussion, observation (tongue, skin, nails, eyes), neurological exam, cardiovascular exam, etc. at 92%; physical exams at 85%; laboratory testing (blood, urine, hair, sweat, saliva, stool, etc. at 80%; Iridology 72%; Biotypology and somatotypese at 62%; Traditional humoral diagnosis (including urine and pulse at 59%; and Traditional Chinese diagnosis (including tongue and pulse) at 57%.

There is a tendency for longer naturopathic programs, primarily those that are training naturopathic doctors to include more hours on the medical assessment aspects of practice, such as physical exams and laboratory testing. Whereas programs that are training naturopaths often emphasize the more subtle assessment tools such as iridology or tongue diagnosis.

Part of the variation in naturopathic practice between a naturopath and a naturopathic doctor is due to the regulatory and political environment in each jurisdiction and country. For example, naturopathic doctors in North America are trained as primary care practitioners. That is, they have the regulatory freedom and responsibility to diagnose. Whereas, in many regions in Europe, naturopaths are not allowed to diagnose and are limited in the scope of assessment that they can conduct, i.e., they are not permitted to do pelvic floor exams.

Q: Is there any difference in how naturopaths and naturopathic doctors treat their patients.

A: The naturopathic profession has always been recognized as an eclectic profession. In fact, one of the strengths of the naturopathic profession is its focus and ability to integrate the traditional therapies of each country into its practice. Although there is variation in the therapies used by naturopaths and naturopathic doctors there are seven core therapies: clinical nutrition, applied nutrition, botanical medicine, hydrotherapy, physical modalities including massage, soft tissue techniques or physical manipulation, counselling and naturopathic psychotherapy and homeopathy. The actual therapies used

tends to reflect more the region and country than whether or not a practitioner is a naturopath or a naturopathic doctor.

Q: Why is it important to distinguish between a naturopath and a naturopathic doctor?

A: Distinguishing between a naturopath and a naturopathic doctor is important for accreditation and regulation. It helps government decide the level of training and the scope of practice for each profession.

Although there is a high degree of similarity in the topics taught within the different naturopathic programs, there is a difference in the depth of knowledge especially as it relates to the clinical and diagnostics sciences. The length of a program is strongly correlated with the scope of practice allowed.

Q: Can a naturopath become a naturopathic doctor?

A: There are some countries where a naturopathic doctor degree is the standard acceptable naturopathic education, such as India and the United States. There are other countries, such as Mexico and Puerto Rico where programs for naturopaths and naturopathic doctors both exist. In other countries, such as in Europe, the standard is programs to train naturopaths.

Whether an individual or a naturopathic institution can increase their educational level from a naturopath to a naturopathic doctor depends on what is permitted in your country. In some countries there are governmental restrictions on terminology and on what is allowed to be taught in a naturopathic program.