

Update on Naturopathy in Europe

From Its Roots to Global Modern Practice



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Europe is the home of traditional Naturopathy, which has been practiced in Europe – albeit under different names – for centuries. Most of the philosophies and theories that we associate with the core of Naturopathy originated in Europe. Naturopathy is considered a system of Traditional Medicine, with its historical roots in Greece. Here, ancient philosophers wrote about philosophies related to the balance of health and nature, first described in pre-Christian times around 600 BC, when the belief changed from a higher divine power as the cause of disease, to natural causes such as imbalances in nature and human health. The foundation of Naturopathy goes back to over 2500 years, with important Greek philosophers and physicians like Hippocrates, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Dioscurides, and Galen; Naturopathy then made its way to other countries in Europe, mainly Germany, in the 11th century. From this time to the 18th century, most contributors to naturopathic modalities have been German healthcare practitioners and physicians.

The Roots of Naturopathy Principles

We also find the basics of naturopathic philosophies, principles, and theories in very old writings. For example, in the works of Paracelsus and the Corpus Hippocraticum we find statements about *Vitalism* and the *Vis*, and in the Organon of Homeopathy from Samuel Hahnemann we find aphorisms about the naturopathic theory of *Vital Force*. We can also already find in the writings of Plato, Hippocrates, Aristotle, Galen, and Hildegard von Bingen the naturopathic philosophy of *Holism* and the principle *Treat the Whole Person*. The important naturopathic principle, *First Do No Harm*, had already been mentioned by Hippocrates, and later by T. Sydenham in the 17th century. *Treat the Cause* was the foundational principle in the treatments of Hildegard von Bingen in the 11th century, described in her book, *Causae et Curae*. Later, C.W. Hufeland (1762-1836) systematized the causes of diseases while also differentiating them into the nearest, the distant, the disposing, and the excitatory causes of diseases.

(Please see more details about the Roots of Naturopathy in the *White Paper on Naturopathic Philosophies, Principles and Theories*,¹ approved by the global naturopathic community and published by the World Naturopathic Federation [WNF] in September 2017.)

Modalities

The scope of naturopathic practice today is based on modalities, which also have their origins in Europe.

Hydrotherapy was described and

systematized by the Hahn family (17th century), and later by V. Priessnitz, S. Kneipp and B. Lust; S. Hahnemann discovered homeopathy in the 18th century; tissue salts were described by W. Schüßler; Spagyrik was described by Paracelsus, and later by J.G. Rademacher. Nutrition, an important naturopathic modality, was always employed to restore health. Nutritional applications had already been promoted by Hippocrates and von Bingen, and later – in the 17th century – by C.W. Hufeland in his great work, *Macrobiotic, the Art of Prolonging Life*. We are also familiar with major contributors to naturopathic nutrition in the 19th century, including S. Kneipp, L. Kuhne, A. Just, and A. Ehret.

Herbal medicine has long been used as a part of Traditional Medicine in all world regions, including Europe, where we see descriptions of plants in old Latin textbooks from Hippocrates, Dioskurides, and Galen. Later, in the Middle Ages, Latin terms for herbs were translated into popular names by Hildegard von Bingen, which helped bring them into more common usage. In the middle of the 16th century, herbal medicine reached its peak, with botanists such as L. Fuchs, J.T. Tabernaemontanus, and H. Bock, who described the health effects of western plants with energetic and functional actions, similar to the description of eastern herbs in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and Ayurveda according to their temperature and quality effects.

The 18th & 19th Centuries

This naturopathic development took place mainly in Europe until the end of the 18th century, when naturopathic movements started in the United States. Herbal medicine, hygiene, and vitalism were forwarded by S. Thomson, S. Graham, and later by W. Alcott, R.T. Trall, J.H. Tilden, J.H. Kellogg, B. Lust and more, who helped develop naturopathic medicine and modern clinical practice in North America. Today, naturopathy / naturopathic medicine spans all world regions, with around 100 000 naturopathic professionals worldwide.

It was also in Europe when, in the middle of the 19th century, conventional medicine started to rapidly grow. Especially around the German University of Medicine and hospital Charité, several researchers, including Rudolph Virchow, Robert Koch, Emil Behring, and Paul Ehrlich (the last 3 being Nobel Prize winners of medicine), paved the way for modern cellular pathology, anatomy, and science of medicine. Since conventional medicine quickly excelled in the areas of surgery, pathology, and the treatment of lethal diseases like tuberculosis, diphtheria, and syphilis, these scientific discoveries and knowledge saved millions of lives.

In light of these new findings, however, philosophies such as *holism* and *vitalism*, and other naturopathic principles and theories related to health and disease, stepped into the background. We owe it to naturopaths, health educators, and integrative-thinking philosophers at that time that Naturopathy in Europe has been carried on from generation to generation

and still exists today. Naturopaths and priests, such as Priest Kneipp, Pastor Felke, L. Kuhne, A. Just, F.E. Bilz, and others, have been especially instrumental in conserving the knowledge.

Today both health systems – naturopathy and conventional medicine – exist in parallel in Europe.

Modern-Day European Pioneers

Naturopathy has also continued to grow strongly in younger countries in Europe, where the profession is just starting, such as Slovakia, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic. Some years ago, despite these countries having knowledge of traditional medicine, the naturopathic profession did not exist in any organized structure.

Thanks to individual colleagues, the profession is gaining access in these European countries. An example is a Slovenian naturopathic colleague trained in Italy, where the profession has existed for a long time. This naturopath is originally from the border between Italy and Slovenia, where both Italian and Slovenian are spoken; as a result, she could be trained in Italy. After her naturopathic studies in Italian educational institutes for Naturopathy, she returned to her home country of Slovenia, where she began writing articles about health and naturopathic topics in Slovenian journals,

opened a naturopathic clinic, founded a naturopathic association and school, and adapted to WHO Benchmarks of Naturopathy. She continues to present to the public about health topics and to write books in the Slovenian language about naturopathic subjects.

Another great pioneer is a Czechoslovakian naturopath trained in Australia, who worked for 10 years there as a naturopath and then returned to the Czech Republic where the naturopathic profession did not exist. She founded a naturopathic association, built a clinic and a naturopathic school, publishes, and organizes presentations in the Czech language.

The challenge in Europe is the diversity of cultures, languages, and health systems in 47 independent countries. Twenty-seven of these countries have a close cooperation, a result of being structured within the European Union (EU). Professional regulation and education exists on a national level but not on a European level. However, there are homologation processes to facilitate free movement of professions in the EU. The core goal of the European naturopathic associations is to work towards standardized education and practice that can ensure that.

Portugal, Switzerland, and Germany regulated the naturopathic profession as a health profession. Other countries have a registry for naturopathic professionals,

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such as the United Kingdom and Spain. Many countries do recognize the profession as a self-employed, legal profession with a financial number (registration through the tax office), but are missing other legal status through the health ministry. Some countries have no legal status at all, thus no title protection or educational standards, which brings some disorder to the profession, and in some countries the profession is even illegal, such as in Austria.

Regulation & Programs

These numerous differences have led many countries to unify their voices through the WNF and in regional activities such as establishing standards for the naturopathic profession and education in Europe, where naturopaths can get a special certification that verifies their studies, professional experiences, and scope of practice. These initiatives are welcome and supported by the WNF.

Educational standards in Naturopathy exist in countries where regulation and title protection is provided. Switzerland, for example, awards the professional title of a diploma (“Naturheilpraktiker mit Diplom”) following a state exam that requires 4 years of study, including 4710 hours of a theoretical basic medicine program, naturopathic program, and internship.

In Portugal, regulation for Naturopathy has existed since 2013, with title protection (“Profissão das terapêuticas não convencionais”) and a 4-year study that includes a minimum of 6000 hours and a 1000-hour clinical internship, as determined by the health department.

Regulation of the naturopathic profession exists in Germany, installed by the state in 1939 via the law, “Das Heilpraktikergesetz.” Germany regulates a state exam and offers title protection (“Heilpraktiker”). Several updates of the law have been made since 1939, the last one being in 2016, when the German federal Ministry of Health published new guidelines for the examination of non-medical practitioner candidates (Heilpraktiker), which are uniform for all states in Germany. The exam is taken through the health department. Educational institutes in Germany have existed for a long time on a self/voluntary, accredited basis. A complete naturopathic program is available offering from 3500 on-site hours, for example the German Naturopathic School “Berufsschule für Naturheilverfahren Josef Angerer,” which opened in 1936 in Munich and was approved by the state of Bavaria in Germany.

Many naturopathic associations in Europe take control of their membership by accepting only well-educated naturopaths with a minimum WHO standard.

Similar control also exists in countries where there is no state regulation of the naturopathic profession. For example, naturopaths cannot obtain malpractice insurance if they do not have an affiliation to a naturopathic association. Some health insurance companies in Europe require practitioner proof of educational certificates or affiliation with naturopathic associations before reimbursing patients. Such examples of control in Europe help to ensure a minimum standard of quality.

Europe represents a wide pool of diversity among educational standards and naturopathic organizations, many of which exist in European countries on a national or

regional level.

A detailed analysis of naturopathic practice globally was published by the WNF for 2015 and 2016. The 2016 Naturopathic Numbers Report² reveals the following statistics within Europe: 50% of the region practices Naturopathy; 43 national naturopathic organizations exist; and 42% of the European countries have naturopathic educational institutions.

The challenge is to support united activities and to bring all countries’ national naturopathic associations together. The WNF accepts only 1 national naturopathic association per country as a full member state. This helps to unify several national associations into 1 national naturopathic federation per country, to represent national interests.

Table 1, taken from the World Naturopathic Federation Report 2015,³ shows the diversity of naturopathic organizations and educational institutions in Europe.

Naturopathic Practitioners on the Rise

To unify the voices of the naturopathic profession within this world region, the WNF is supporting all steps toward higher educational standards and regulation.

The WNF currently has 9 full member states from Europe, 4 educational members, and 1 associate member.⁴ Four European member states are elected to the WNF Executive Board, and members are active in a number of WNF committees, such as research, roots, education, professional mapping, and membership.

The large number of naturopathic practitioners in Europe illustrates that the longer the practice of naturopathy / naturopathic medicine has existed in a region, the greater the number of practitioners. Europe has approximately 60 000 registered naturopathic professionals, of which 40 000 are registered as Heilpraktiker, only in Germany. The high number of naturopaths in Germany is due to its long naturopathic history and important contributors from the country.

Table 2, also taken from the WNF Report 2015,³ shows the number of naturopathic practitioners according to region.

Naturopathic Education in Europe

Numerous educational institutions exist in Europe with different lengths of study. They are often self-accredited or accredited by naturopathic organizations, or by the government in some countries; however, all teach, with a high consistency, the topics of basic sciences, naturopathic roots, and naturopathic modalities.

The Naturopathic Roots Report 2016⁵ showed that the highest diversity in naturopathic education, in all world regions, is in Europe. This was based on a survey sent to 85 naturopathic institutions worldwide. Two of the respondents from Europe indicated that their naturopathic institutions opened before 1950; 1 opened between 1951 and 1975; 5 opened between 1976 and 2000; and 5 opened after the year 2000. The length of naturopathic programs offered varies also: 1 of the respondents offers a program just under 1500 hours; 3 of the programs offer between 1500 and 1999 hours; 1 program offers between 2000 and 2999 hours; 4 of the programs offer between 3000 and 3999 hours; and 1

Table 1. Number & Type of Organization by Region

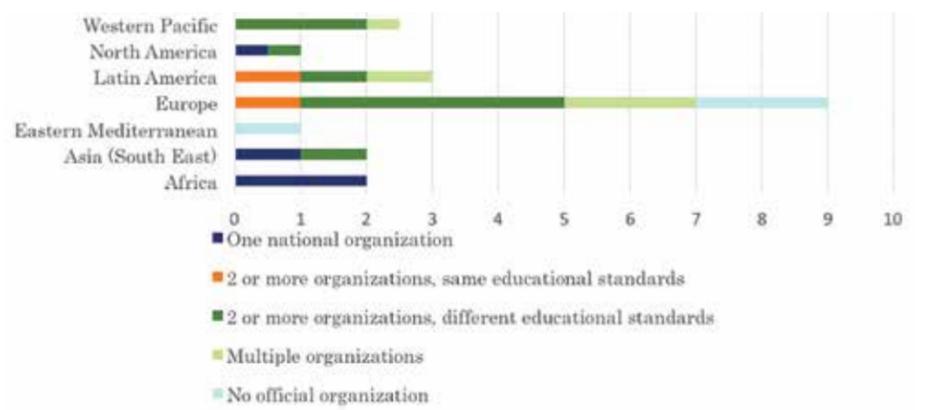


Table 2. Naturopathic Practitioners by Region

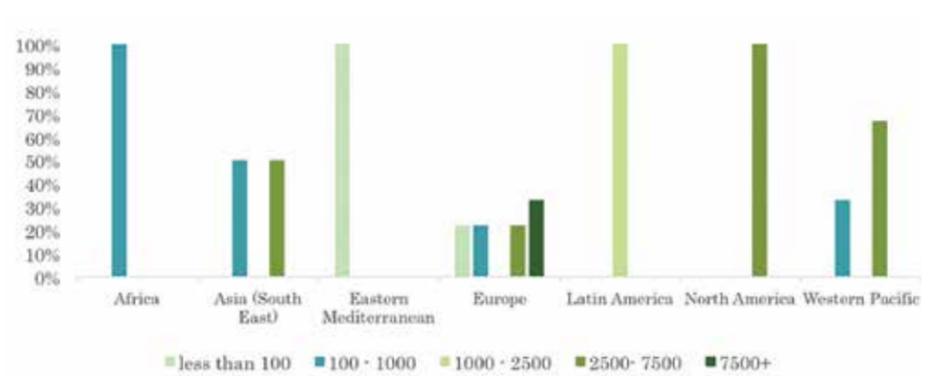
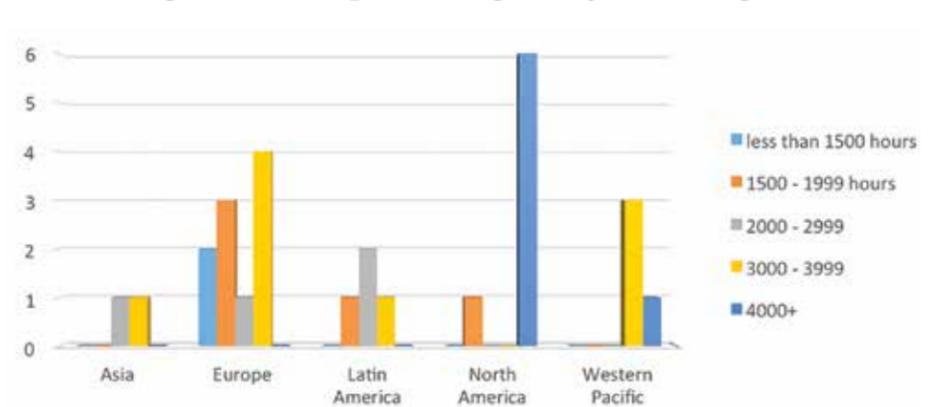


Table 3. Length of Naturopathic Program by World Region



program offers over 4000 hours. Table 3, taken from the Naturopathic Roots Report 2016, shows the diversity of program length according to world region.

The main challenge in Europe is to increase educational standards in countries where regulation does not yet exist and to exchange curricula to unify the programs.

WNF currently has 4 educational members united in the WNF Educational Committee, where knowledge, curricula, standards, and support are evaluated on an active basis.

In addition, the WNF has established regional support groups such as the European Support Committee, to help unite the naturopathic profession by respecting its diversity. This committee is composed of full members dedicated to creating a common voice and supporting each other by sharing regulatory processes in the various European countries.

WNF also provides support by representing the global naturopathic community with regard to European naturopathic conferences that help promote a deeper insight of challenges, developments, and steps towards a unified profession in that world region.

Looking Forward

A key goal for Naturopathy in Europe is to maintain it as a Traditional Medicine system with its roots of naturopathic philosophies, principles, and theories. Many of the naturopathic modalities applied today are based on a long history and a conceptual model described by European contributors in the past.

The therapeutic interventions used by our ancient holistic health practitioners were always based in a natural hierarchy, from lifestyle counseling and activating the patient’s own vital force, to applying no harmful remedies in the process of restoring health. The *Corpus Hippocraticum* described these in numerous texts around 400 BC.

The ongoing development of clinical practice and research in naturopathic medicine in North America and the Western Pacific has led to important contributions to naturopathy / naturopathic medicine, providing a clear picture of naturopathic principles and theories. These have been defined in a common language and organized into therapeutic models by single naturopathic professionals and organizations within the last 30 years. Thanks to all these universal definitions, we have a better understanding of where Naturopathy comes from, as well as a common naturopathic language with which to move forward as a unified profession.

The European interest is to conserve the naturopathic knowledge that is deeply rooted in the system of Traditional Medicine. Therefore, all the processes aimed toward unifying, codifying, defining, and identifying the naturopathic profession in its broad scope of theory and practice are critical for keeping naturopathy / naturopathic medicine growing strongly in research, codifications, modern practice, and high educational standards worldwide. ▀

References available online at ndnr.com