

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. In many countries, the practice of naturopathy is referred to *Naturopathy* and the practitioners are referred to as *naturopaths*; yet in other countries, generally where there is increased regulation and educational standards, the practice is referred to as *Naturopathic Medicine* and the practitioners are referred to as *Naturopathic Doctors*. The following Q&A is designed to provide clarification on two of the main titles used within the profession - naturopath and naturopathic doctor.

The following are how the terms “naturopath” and “naturopathic doctor” are translated throughout the world:

- Naturopath –Naturópata, licenciado en Naturopatia, Naturópata Licenciado, Heilpraktiker, Naturheilpraktiker, Naturopathe, Naturopata, Naturista, Educateur de santé Naturopathe or Praticien de santé Naturopathe, Naturopatijo, Naturopaat, Naturopat, Naturopaatti Luonnonparantaja, Φυσικοπαθητικός, HP, N.L.
- Naturopathic Doctor – Naturopathic Physician, Doctor of Naturopathic Medicine, Doctor Naturopático, Doctor en Naturopatía, Naturópata con Doctorado, ND, DNM.

Q1: What is the main difference between a naturopath and a naturopathic doctor?

A1: 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 with a doctorate degree and that practices in a region where the title “*naturopathic doctor*” is permitted in the regulation of the naturopathic profession in that area. It is important to note that the term “*naturopathic doctor*” and/or “*naturopathic medicine*” does not exist or can’t be used due to regulation in some regions of the world. Some countries have extensive naturopathic educational programs but the title used is Naturopath.

Q2: Is there any difference in the naturopathic principles, philosophy or theories that are taught to naturopaths or naturopathic doctors?

A2: 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.

<http://worldnaturopathicfederation.org/wnf-publications/>

Q3: Is there any difference in what is taught in the different naturopathic programs.

A3: 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 more so than whether the program graduates “*naturopaths*” or “*naturopathic doctors*”.

Q4: Is there any difference in how a naturopath or naturopathic doctor diagnoses or assesses patients?

A4: 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 somatotype 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.

Q5: Is there any difference in how naturopaths and naturopathic doctors treat their patients.

A5: 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*.

Q6: Why is it important to distinguish between a naturopath and a naturopathic doctor?

A6: What is important is recognizing that both terms are used globally in the naturopathic profession. 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 can be a difference in the depth of knowledge especially as it relates to the clinical and diagnostics sciences. The length of a naturopathic program often correlates with the scope of practice allowed.. It is important to note, that the designation of “naturopath” does not always imply decreased educational standards. It is important to reference the educational standards and political considerations of each country.

Q7: Can a naturopath become a naturopathic doctor?

A7: There are some countries, such as India and the United States a naturopathic doctor degree is the standard acceptable naturopathic education with programs that are about 4000 hours in length or longer. In other countries, such as Europe, the standard is naturopathic programs that train *naturopaths* yet the length of educational programs range from 1500 hours to over 3000 hours. There are other countries where naturopathic educational programs for *naturopaths* and *naturopathic doctors* both exist, with distinct differences in the length of program

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 their country. In some countries there are governmental restrictions on terminology and on what is allowed to be taught in a naturopathic program and what designation a practitioner can use upon graduation.

If an individual with training as a naturopath wants to move into a region where naturopathic doctor is the standard, they have to work with the current naturopathic educational institutions and/or regulatory colleges to determine what additional training and/or requirements are necessary in order to be recognized as a naturopathic doctor.

Q8: Do all naturopaths have the same educational standards?

A8: There is considerable diversity within the naturopathic profession when it comes to naturopathic educational standards. World Health Organization (WHO) has set benchmarking criteria for naturopathic education at 1500 hours. Naturopathic educational programs range from 1500 to 4500 hours or more with most programs being over 2000 hours. The WNF is planning on working with the WHO on updating those benchmarks. The WNF follows the WHO standards as part of its membership criteria as outlined on its website: <http://worldnaturopathicfederation.org/membership/>

There are 2000 hour programs that graduate naturopaths and there are 4000 hour programs that graduate naturopaths. Most naturopathic programs that graduate naturopaths are 3000 hours or less. Naturopathic educational institutions that graduate naturopathic doctors are generally 4000 hours or longer.

It is important to note in countries that lack naturopathic regulation there may be practitioners that refer to themselves as naturopaths, but do not meet the standards accepted by the World Naturopathic Federation (WNF) or set by the World Health Organization (WHO).