

I. Naturopathic Principle: First, Do No Harm (*primum non nocere*)

Origin:

This concept was believed to originate in the writings of the Corpus Hippocraticum around 400 BC in which it says:

“In hidden incurable diseases, one should never give any remedies, healthy people should not be given any remedies, because in a perfectly healthy body everything medically is harmful, the physician also endeavours to prevent harmful influences in case of diseases and initiate or promote appropriate influences in the same”.⁽³⁶⁾

The Hippocratic oath states:

“3. i. And I will use regiments for the benefit of the ill in accordance with my ability and my judgment, but from (what is) to their harm or injustice I will keep (them).

4. i. And I will not give a drug that is deadly to anyone if asked (for it), . . . ”⁽³⁶⁾

The principle First, do no harm (*primum non nocere*) has been developed over the centuries, to include a much broader appreciation for the risks and nature of health care practise. The naturopathic theory, Therapeutic Order was developed as a means of guiding practitioners how to Do No Harm.

Description:

First, Do No Harm or *primum non nocere* refers to not only the patient but to the patient's vital force. Naturopaths / naturopathic doctors work on the basis that there is a hierarchy to treatment choices. To *do no harm*, a naturopath / naturopathic doctor chooses the therapy, and fashions the most gentle and non-invasive strategy to achieve the desired outcome for each individual patient.⁽⁸⁾ In situations, especially when the progression of disease is advanced or the current state is critical, it may be necessary to utilize aggressive treatments or treatments that pose the risk of adverse effects. An aggressive treatment may require referral for drugs or surgery.⁽²¹⁾ Often health can be restored by changing lifestyle, addressing environmental or external factors and/or by addressing social or stressful situations directly. Naturopathic philosophy is centred on respecting the holistic nature and vitality of each patient and ensuring that the healing process is supported rather than overridden or suppressed.⁽²¹⁾ This principle was expounded by Louis Kuhne⁽⁴⁰⁾ (one of the forerunners of the naturopathic profession) when he stated, “Disease, if repressed or rendered latent, leads slowly, but surely to severe and wholly incurable conditions of health”

Do no harm involves naturopaths / naturopathic doctors teaching patients the necessary insights and awareness of how their lifestyle choices, their environment, social relationships and all aspects life are interrelated and have the potential to affect their health and to contribute to disease.⁽⁴¹⁾

Another aspect of *Do no harm* is identifying and respecting the healing intention and capacity of each person. Taking into consideration a patient's treatment objectives, vitality and constitution is part of the naturopathic treatment process.⁽⁴²⁾

Although the practice of naturopathy is generally considered to be very safe, no form of medical practice, including naturopathy, is without some risk, either physically, emotionally, mentally or ethically. To follow the naturopathic principle, ‘First, Do No Harm (*primum non nocere*)’, every naturopath /

naturopathic doctor needs to educate themselves comprehensively on safety issues, including drug interactions with herbal and nutritional remedies. There are two aspects of “harm”⁽⁴³⁾ that every health care practitioner and naturopath / naturopathic doctor needs to be aware of:

- *Harms of Commission* – harmfulness of substances, harmfulness of procedures and ethical harms.
- *Harms of Omission* – lack of information on which to make wise decisions, lack of follow-up and support.

Naturopathy is safely practiced when standards of education and practice are adhered to⁽⁴⁴⁾, such as:

- choosing treatments that support the innate healing ability of the body
- choosing treatments that honour the laws of nature
- teaching patients insight and awareness into all the factors that contribute to health and disease.
- choosing diagnostic techniques that are non-invasive, whenever possible
- Avoid, when possible, the harmful suppression of symptoms.⁽⁴⁵⁾

Contributors to the Principle First, Do No Harm (*primum non nocere*):

First, Do No Harm is a principle that is discussed in many aspects of health care. The following are contributors to the naturopathic application of this principle:

- **Thomas Sydenham** (1624-1689), an English physician, frequently referred to as the English Hippocrates, said in his Latin aphorism respecting a physician’s duties: “*Primum est ut non nocere*”.⁽⁴⁶⁾
- **Jared L. Zeff**, an American ND instrumental in codifying naturopathic information since the early 1980 such as Emunctory theory and he proposed an Therapeutic Order theory together with Snider, Myers and Grandpere, NDs. He writes in an article about this principle:

“How do we apply the principle, *Do no harm*? Our definition tells us: Naturopathic physicians follow three precepts to avoid harming the patient:

1. Naturopathic physicians utilize methods and medicinal substances which minimize the risk of harmful effects, and apply the least possible force or intervention necessary to diagnose illness and restore health;

2. Whenever possible, the suppression of symptoms is avoided as suppression generally interferes with the healing process;

3. Naturopathic physicians respect and work with the *vis medicatrix naturae* in diagnosis, treatment and counselling, for if this self-healing process is not respected the patient may be harmed.”⁽⁴¹⁾

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