

## **Becoming a Naturopathic Doctor: Your Questions Answered**

**Q:** What sort of training is required to become a Naturopathic Physician, or ND?

**A:** A minimum of 7 years post- secondary education is required. Most NDs first complete a four year Bachelors degree in the arts or sciences, and then the required four years at naturopathic medical college. Students must then pass comprehensive licensing exams in order to be registered to practice medicine.

**Q:** Where are the accredited naturopathic medical colleges?

**A:** There are only four accredited schools on the continent. There is one in Canada, the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine, in Toronto, at 416/251-5261. In the US there is Bastyr University in Seattle, WA, 206/523-9585; the National College of Naturopathic Medicine in Portland, OR, 503/255-4860; and the Southwest College in Scottsdale, AZ, 602/990-7424. All four institutions are recognized here in BC, elsewhere in Canada, and in the US by the Council on Naturopathic Medical Education, the authorized American accrediting body.

**Q:** How long will it take to get my degree, and how much will it cost?

**A:** To be licensed in BC, the required study programme at naturopathic college is four years, full-time. No correspondence courses are available. However, some students elect to complete their studies in five or six years. The cost varies from college to college, and of course there is the exchange rate to consider at US schools. Students should be prepared to pay between \$12-15,000 USD per year for tuition and equipment.

**Q:** After graduation, what sort of income can I expect to make?

**A:** Income varies according to the style of medical practice a doctor chooses. A naturopathic medical practice where the doctor has no support staff and works part-time may only generate \$20 or \$30

thousand a year, whereas a doctor who employs a large staff and works long hours can make in excess of \$200 thousand a year. The average income for doctors in BC is in the \$80 thousand range.

**Q:** What are some of the positive features about being a naturopathic physician?

**A:** Most doctors like the constant challenge of their jobs. No two days are alike, varying with the patients that come into the office. Most importantly, NDs enjoy helping people with their most important possession—their health.

**Q:** What are some of the drawbacks of being an ND?

**A:** One of the problems is that some people just want to be “fixed” and are not interested in helping themselves to better health.

**Q:** What does an ND do in a typical day?

**A:** For most doctors, there is no such thing as a typical day. In any given week a doctor will: take new patient histories; perform physical exams; perform laboratory tests; prescribe natural medicines such as herbs, supplements and homeopathic medicines; perform physical medicine, such as naturopathic manipulation and physiotherapy. Doctors also study scientific journals and books and, of course, manage clinic business.

**Q:** What type of person is best suited to the profession of naturopathic medicine?

**A:** A person who is interested in people. A person who has a sincere interest in talking to people and helping them to solve their health concerns in a constructive and naturally therapeutic fashion.

**Q:** What are the necessary skills required to be an ND?

**A:** As noted, people skills are most important. But also communication skills and strong clinical expertise in the basic sciences.

**Q:** What high school subjects are recommended for students interested in the profession?

**A:** Students should have a good comprehension of biology, chemistry, physics, sociology and computers. Written and verbal communication skills are also very important.

**Q:** Do doctors continue to expand their knowledge of natural medicine after college?

**A:** Yes, every day. New patients with different needs come into naturopathic clinics every day. Also, new medical assessment and treatment techniques are being developed all the time and doctors are continually upgrading their skills. This upgrading is called continuing education. As a condition of maintaining a medical license, all NDs must meet minimum hours of continuing education every year.

**Q:** What is the growth potential for this field? Are there too many NDs or not enough?

**A:** At present the province of BC is under-served by NDs. There is a huge demand for doctors in many areas of the province. Additionally, the health-care professions are in a growth period, and will continue to be so for at least the next 15 years. The growing awareness of natural approaches to regaining and maintaining health have created a boom for anyone entering this, or a related profession.

**Q:** Is naturopathic medicine changing? Have technological advances affected this field?

**A:** At the core of naturopathic medicine are three tenets which have remained unchanged over time. They are: The healing power of nature, which is the use of natural medicine to restore and support inherent healing systems in the body; do no harm to the patient, which emphasizes non-invasive protocols; and find the cause, which means that a diagnosis must go further than the surface expression of disease, and find the underlying cause. While these tenets remain unchanged, technology has had a profound and positive effect on the profession. The newest medical and scientific discoveries and

equipment help doctors better diagnose disease and to effectively treat it, without compromising the fundamental principles of naturopathic medicine.

Questions? Comments? Email us at: [bcna@bcna.ca](mailto:bcna@bcna.ca)

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