

Naturopathy

**An information sheet from the Kentucky Council Against Health Fraud
www.kcahf.org**

Overview

Naturopathy is an approach to healing using “natural” means such as diet and lifestyle. Naturopathy may incorporate approaches such as dietary supplements, herbs, exercise, massage, iridology, acupuncture, hair analysis and homeopathy. Although it has some basic themes, there is no unified theory and set of practices; individual practitioners select approaches which appeal to them and which seem to work with their patients.

Some naturopaths attend college programs leading to the N.D. degree. The profession is licensed or certified in some states but not in Kentucky.

Scientific assessment

We feel that naturopathy is an invalid and potentially dangerous approach to health care:

- Rather than being grounded in scientific concepts, naturopathy is based on outmoded, 19th-century ideas such as *vitalism*, the doctrine that living things have distinct “vital principles” or “life forces” which lie beyond regular scientific understanding of matter and energy. Thus, naturopaths are likely to embrace unscientific ideas such as balancing the body’s “energy”; to be overconfident in the body’s ability to heal itself; and to consider “natural” remedies such as herbs superior to more scientifically based treatments.
- Naturopathy holds that many diseases are due to the accumulation of “toxins,” a scientifically invalid concept.
- Many approaches used by naturopaths are pseudoscientific, for example, homeopathy, chelation therapy, colonic irrigation, hair analysis, and some electrical diagnostic devices. Others may have some basis but have not yet been shown to be safe and effective, for example, acupuncture, some herbal remedies, and some nutritional supplements. (See our other handouts on these topics.)
- When a naturopathic treatment produces adverse reactions, these are sometimes interpreted as a “healing crisis” caused by the “toxins” coming out. Taking such warning signals as a positive sign that the therapy is working is potentially dangerous.
- Naturopathy has a history of opposition to science-based medicine, and has discouraged childhood immunizations.
- Many naturopaths see themselves as being able to treat effectively most health problems, and wish to take on the role of primary physicians. This is potentially dangerous since naturopaths lack the rigorous training of medical doctors.

For further details, see:

<http://www.quackwatch.org/01QuackeryRelatedTopics/Naturopathy/naturopathy.html>

Recommendations

While some approaches recommended by naturopaths (such as diet and lifestyle) may be useful, others are invalid and possibly dangerous. KCAHF recommends that scientifically-based health professionals be consulted rather than naturopaths.

Recommendations of KCAHF are based on our assessments of the scientific literature concerning unconventional approaches to health care. For specific recommendations concerning your medical condition, consult your physician.

For further information, contact KCAHF, 7605 Devondale Ct., Louisville, KY 40222 or send e-mail to: tjwheeler@louisville.edu