

AANMC Core Competencies

of the Graduating Naturopathic Student



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The purpose of the document is to describe the required core competencies of a graduate from an accredited naturopathic doctoral program in order to align curriculum, define expectations of graduates, and inform stakeholders regarding the education of physicians/doctors who practice naturopathic medicine. The expectation is that this document will serve to guide current and future programs of naturopathic medical education.

Introduction

Naturopathic Medicine is a distinct primary health care profession that combines the traditions of natural healing with the rigors of modern science. Naturopathic physicians/doctors (NDs) are trained as primary care providers who diagnose, treat and manage patients who have acute and chronic conditions, while addressing disease and dysfunction at the levels of body, mind and spirit. NDs concentrate on whole patient wellness through health promotion and disease prevention, attempting to find the underlying cause of the patient's condition. NDs care for patients of all ages and genders. They provide individualized, evidence-informed therapies, applying the least harmful and most effective approaches to help facilitate the body's inherent ability to restore and maintain optimal health.

A resurgence of interest in naturopathic medicine in North America in the 1970s resulted in rapid growth and maturation of the naturopathic profession to where it is today. As of 2019, there are seven accredited institutions of higher learning offering naturopathic degrees across North America. The Council on Naturopathic Medical Education (CNME) is the accrediting body for these programs. Graduates of CNME accredited naturopathic medical programs receive a Naturopathic Doctoral designation (ND) and are eligible to take the entry to practice examination.

The Association of Accredited Naturopathic Medical Colleges (AANMC) and its Council of Chief Academic and Clinical Officers (CCACO), recognized the need for agreement among the AANMC member schools on clinical expectations for graduates of CNME-accredited naturopathic medical programs. As such, CCACO and AANMC embarked on examination of current clinical expectations and the creation of a unified baseline for clinical competence of the naturopathic medical graduate. In August of 2012, CCACO agreed to embark on the creation of naturopathic clinical competencies for the accredited institutions. In July 2013, academic and clinical deans from each CNME accredited institution developed a draft document, after which time CCACO convened a taskforce of representatives from the accredited naturopathic medical programs and the executive director of the AANMC. This subgroup met regularly for six months, and received input from CCACO, stakeholders and advisors in the broader medical and educational communities to create the first draft of the naturopathic clinical competency document. The document then received input from the naturopathic community and final approval from CCACO and the AANMC Board of Directors. The process for review and revision of the Competencies was initiated in 2018. The following report constitutes consensus among AANMC members on the clinical competencies for the naturopathic medical graduate.

Core Principles

The practice of naturopathic medicine is guided by six core principles.¹

First Do No Harm (Primum Non Nocere): The ND follows three guidelines to avoid harming the patient:

- Uses methods and medicinal substances which minimize the risk of harmful side effects;
- Uses the least force necessary to diagnose and treat; avoid when possible the harmful suppression of symptoms; and
- Acknowledges, respects, and works with individuals' self-healing process.

The Healing Power of Nature (Vis Medicatrix Naturae): The ND recognizes an inherent self-healing process in people that is ordered and intelligent. The ND acts to identify and remove obstacles to healing and recovery, and to facilitate and augment this inherent self-healing process.

Identify and Treat the Causes (Tolle Causam): The ND seeks to identify and remove the underlying cause(s) of illness rather than to merely eliminate or suppress symptoms.

Doctor as Teacher (Docere): The ND educates patients and encourages self-responsibility for health. The ND also recognizes and employs the therapeutic potential of the doctor-patient relationship.

Treat the Whole Person: The ND treats each patient by taking into account individual physical, mental, emotional, genetic, environmental, social, and other factors. Since total health also includes spiritual health, the ND encourages individuals to pursue their personal spiritual development.

Prevention: The ND emphasizes the prevention of disease by assessing risk factors, heredity and susceptibility to disease, and by making appropriate interventions in partnership with the patient to prevent illness.

The Seven Areas of Competence for the Naturopathic Medical Graduate:

- Medical Assessment and Diagnosis
- Patient Management
- Communication and Collaboration
- Professionalism
- Career Development and Practice Management
- System-based Practice
- Practice-based Learning, Research and Scholarship

¹ The core principles are defined by American Association of Naturopathic Physicians (AANP) and endorsed by the Canadian Association of Naturopathic Doctors (CAND).

Medical Assessment and Diagnosis

Naturopathic medical graduates conduct a complete and accurate history, physical exam and objective assessment, to arrive at a diagnosis. They demonstrate the knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes expected of an ND within the context of a patient-centered model. They consider the impact of personal and institutional biases and stereotypes on health care and clinical decision-making.

The naturopathic medical graduate:

Elicits a complete and accurate medical and biopsychosocial history

- Establishes a therapeutic doctor-patient relationship
- Demonstrates active listening when taking a history and performing a physical exam
- Assesses the determinants of health, as defined by the World Health Organization
- Documents the medical record consistent with legal, institutional, and ethical requirements

Performs a complete and accurate health examination, including pathological and functional assessment

- Honors and respects gender and cross-cultural concerns when performing a physical exam
- Selects assessments and performs diagnostic procedures based on a risk/benefit analysis
- Performs appropriate system-specific or hypothesis-driven examination, based on patient presentation
- Performs health screenings for disease prevention and early diagnosis
- Performs and/or orders appropriate diagnostic tests and imaging studies
- Identifies emergent and life-threatening situations and diagnoses
- Performs assessments mindful of personal biases including, but not limited to, age, sex, race, ethnicity, disability, religion, social status, gender identity, and sexual orientation

Formulates an accurate medical diagnosis

- Interprets diagnostics tests, physical examination, and imaging reports/studies
- Integrates the medical history, physical examination and diagnostic testing with naturopathic principles in formulating a diagnosis
- Applies critical thinking and clinical reasoning in the determination of a medical diagnosis
- Recognizes the limitations of medical literature and technology in the formulation of a diagnosis
- Assesses, manages and triages emergent situations
- Communicates assessment findings and diagnosis with the patient as appropriate

Patient Management

Naturopathic medical graduates provide personalized, compassionate, ethical, holistic patient care. They employ appropriate management strategies to promote health and prevention of disease. They take into account each intervention's risk of harm, efficacy, and level of evidence. Patient values and priorities are addressed through an informed consent process in the development of a management plan and throughout treatment.

The naturopathic medical graduate:

Establishes therapeutic relationships with patients

- Establishes rapport by exercising conditions for cultural safety, empathy, active listening, and a conscientious approach to care
- Builds and maintains patient-centered interactions appropriate to the clinical situation
- Understands and respects the doctor/patient roles and responsibilities
- Actively collaborates with patients in shared decision-making

Develops an individualized treatment plan consistent with naturopathic principles

- Uses best practices and best available evidence
- Emphasizes health promotion and illness prevention
- Considers the safety, efficacy, contraindications, actions and interactions of therapies, predicted outcomes, alternatives, and costs
- Assesses the impact of cultural and psychosocial issues, health disparities and community factors
- Addresses physical, spiritual, mental and emotional aspects of the patient
- Considers patients' circumstances and ability to implement and adhere to recommendations, and adjusts management based on patient needs and goals
- Recommends strategies that individualize patient care and reflect the principles of naturopathic medicine. Therapies are those consistent with the offerings at CNME recognized institutions.

Facilitates patient decision-making processes by presenting evidence informed therapeutic and wellness options including risks, benefits, costs and alternatives to therapies

- Engages patients in establishing a long-term focus for their personal health management with an emphasis on prevention and wellness
- Considers Therapeutic Order in assessing patients and developing treatment plans²
- Provides counseling and support for patients and significant others related to acute and chronic illness, and end-of-life issues
- Recommends plan follow-up care
- Reassesses treatment plans considering clinical outcomes, best practices and patient needs
- Documents plan of care and all revisions to plan of care
- Recognizes personal limitations, for adheres to scope of practice and makes referrals when appropriate

² Zeff, J., Snider, P., Myers, S., & DeGrandpre, Z. (2012). A Hierarchy of Healing: The Therapeutic Order. V: Pizzorno J, Murray M, editors. Textbook of Natural Medicine, 4, 18-33.

- Intervenes and/or refers in urgent and emergent care situations

Immunization Education

Naturopathic medical graduates demonstrate comprehensive clinical knowledge regarding immunization and vaccine preventable diseases.

The naturopathic medical graduate:

- Demonstrates knowledge of etiology, pathophysiology and epidemiology of vaccine preventable diseases
- Demonstrates knowledge of mechanism of action of vaccines
- Demonstrates knowledge of the risk involved to self and others of being under vaccinated or unvaccinated
- Demonstrates knowledge of the immunization schedule within the parameters of regulatory jurisdictions
- Demonstrates knowledge of indications and contraindications of vaccines
- Demonstrates ability to manage side effects and adverse reactions to vaccines
- Demonstrates knowledge of jurisdictional reporting requirements regarding adverse reactions
- Demonstrates the ability to educate the vaccine-hesitant individual
- Demonstrates knowledge of vaccine administration and maintenance requirements

Communication and Collaboration

Naturopathic medical graduates communicate effectively, in person or via technology, to optimize patient relationships and patient care. They consult, collaborate with and refer to other health professionals as appropriate.

The naturopathic medical graduate:

- Communicates accurately and effectively with patients and their support team(s), ensuring their understanding
- Describes naturopathic medicine succinctly, delineating the role and scope of practice of an ND within their jurisdiction
- Listens to and incorporates the patient narrative in the analysis of overall health and well-being
- Considers cultural and community factors affecting patient health

Educates patients regarding their diagnosis and prognosis.

- Demonstrates empathy, compassion, and objectivity in patient interactions
- Demonstrates sensitivity and respect for cultural identity including, but not limited to, age, sex, race, ethnicity, disability, religion, social status, gender identity and expression, and sexual orientation
- Utilizes appropriate resources when experiencing barriers to communication

Consults with and/or refers to other healthcare professionals when care is outside of scope of practice or personal competence.

- Conveys effective verbal and written communication to other healthcare professionals
- Collaborates as a member of the patient's health care team to provide safe and effective care
- Recommends appropriate referral, taking into consideration distance, cost and other barriers to care

Educates members of the patient's health care team regarding the role of naturopathic medicine and the ND in patient care.

- Recognizes and respects the roles and responsibilities of other professionals within the healthcare team
- Collaborates as a member of the health care community to address health disparities and public health issues
- Provides leadership in promoting the ND as an integral member of the health care community
- Advances naturopathic medicine and its principles within the community at large

Professionalism

Naturopathic medical graduates demonstrate professional behavior, personal integrity and altruism. They are aware of their limitations in expertise, operate within the jurisdictional scope of practice, and refer patients when appropriate. As health care professionals and leaders in the community, they exemplify the principles of naturopathic medicine personally and professionally.

The naturopathic of medical graduate:

Maintains legal and ethical standards in all forms of public and professional interactions (e.g., personal, written, electronic), as related but not limited to:

- Patient confidentiality
- Informed consent
- Documentation of care
- Scope of practice
- Mandatory reporting
- Professional boundaries
- Conflicts of interest
- Finance, practice-related documentation and billing
- Professional forums, presentations, and interviews

Demonstrates respect and integrity in professional interactions

- Fulfills professional commitments in a timely and responsible manner
- Demonstrates respect/awareness/consideration for patient and community diversity
- Responds to constructive feedback as part of the evaluation of professional competence
- Recognizes and addresses ethical issues arising in practice
- Demonstrates a commitment to balancing patient care, self-care, and responsibilities to colleagues, community, family and friends
- Contributes to the growth and development of the profession

Career Development and Practice Management

The naturopathic medical graduate develops a viable career plan. They create an ethical business model that reflects the needs of the patient population they serve, and demonstrate the requisite skills to be able to plan and execute achievable professional goals.

The naturopathic medical graduate:

- Applies principles of marketing to establish and develop a naturopathic medical practice
- Applies tools and techniques to communicate with potential patient populations
- Builds a professional brand/profile
- Applies best practices in marketing and practice management principles
- Demonstrates the ability to plan and manage time and resources
- Establishes a professional network that meets patient and community needs
- Identifies, assesses, and responds to practice/career challenges and opportunities

Systems-Based Practice

Naturopathic medical graduates demonstrate an awareness of the developing role of naturopathic medicine within larger frameworks of healthcare systems, advocating for optimal patient and community health care.

The naturopathic medical graduate:

- Appropriately refers to healthcare professionals, utilizing social and healthcare resources
- Influences population health through education and community initiatives
- Develops collaborative, interprofessional relationships that optimize patient care outcomes
- Recognizes healthcare team dynamics and works within defined professional roles
- Applies technology to the cost-effective delivery of patient care services
- Participates effectively within a healthcare team
- Practices cost-effective healthcare through evidence-informed management, preventive strategies and lifestyle management, with an aim at alleviating the overall healthcare burden
- Addresses specific cultural, economic and social determinants that affect the health of individuals and communities

Practice-Based Learning, Research, and Scholarship

Naturopathic medical graduates critically appraise, assimilate and apply scientific evidence to improve healthcare. They demonstrate an understanding of the strengths and limitations of research. Naturopathic graduates are dedicated to ongoing personal reflection and lifelong learning.

The naturopathic medical graduate:

Practices evidence-informed patient care:

- Formulates a clinical research question to guide the design of the information search, using the principles and tools of evidence-based medicine
- Conducts effective literature searches, accessing appropriate resources to answer clinical questions
- Recognizes bias in the literature
- Demonstrates an understanding of and applies medical statistics to patient care
- Critically appraises data and evaluates levels of evidence in clinical decision-making
- Evaluates patient care outcomes using qualitative and quantitative methods
- Contributes to the development and dissemination of knowledge

Demonstrates reflective practice and a commitment to lifelong learning:

- Recognizes limitations in their own knowledge, skills, and attitudes
- Uses feedback from others and reflects on professional competence
- Actively engages in continuing education and professional development

Bibliography

American Association of Naturopathic Physicians. (1989). Definition of Naturopathic Medicine. Retrieved from <https://www.naturopathic.org/content.asp?contentid=59>

Zeff, J., Snider, P., Myers, S., & DeGrandpre, Z. (2012). A Hierarchy of Healing: The Therapeutic Order. V: Pizzorno J, Murray M, editors. Textbook of Natural Medicine, 4, 18-33.