

## NATUROPATHIC MEDICINE: THE VISIT

by Dean Schrader ND

Prospective patients may have many questions or reservations prior to visiting a naturopathic doctor. What are they going to ask me? Why are the visits so long? Do naturopathic doctors use any laboratory tests? These are some of the questions that individuals maybe asking themselves. This article will help to educate the prospective patient and possibly help to alleviate any anxiety prior to the initial visit.

First of all, the patient is required to complete a comprehensive questionnaire. The length of the visit is approximately 1-2 hours. The, the naturopathic doctor addresses the primary reasons for the visit. Discovering the root of the problem (the primary cause of the illness or dysfunction) is the goal of the first visit. To achieve this, a myriad of questions are asked during the process. For any given illness or symptom, there maybe several underlying causes. Take fatigue, for example. Fatigue maybe due to anemia, hypo or hyperthyroidism, adrenal gland dysfunction, poor diet, food and environmental allergies/sensitivities, gastro-intestinal issues, liver dysfunction, or depression, to name a few of the more common causes. It is the job of the interviewer to determine the underlying cause using a comprehensive, holistic approach to diagnosis and treatment.

A review of the major systems of the body typically follows. Questions pertaining to the gastro-intestinal system, the endocrine system (thyroid, adrenal, male/female hormones), and nervous system are examples of the system review that is covered. Other dietary and lifestyle factors are also questioned.

After the questions, an appropriate physical exam, or relevant portion thereof, is performed. Licensed naturopathic doctors are trained as primary care physicians and are therefore capable of diagnosing and treating disease. Examinations may include conventional diagnostic techniques or other functional tests. Some functional tests may help to differentiate between some of the possible underlying causes of a particular health issue.

The next step may include an appropriate blood, urine, fecal, or salivary test to determine the correct diagnosis. These tests may give the doctor some reliable objective evidence to base a treatment plan. In certain situations, laboratory tests may not be necessary.

The final step in this process, is the treatment plan. The treatment plan often includes dietary and lifestyle advice. Clinical nutrition is the cornerstone of a naturopathic doctor's training. Other treatment modalities that maybe used include botanical medicine, homeopathy, hydrotherapy, physical medicine, and Chinese medicine. Most patients receive dietary advice along with specific medications (if necessary). The medications given help to correct the underlying health issue and are often given for a short duration.

As you can see, a visit to a naturopathic doctor is both lengthy and thorough. The entire process is necessary to treat the root of the problem. Some health issues may not require this lengthy process; however, most health issues do require a lengthy interview. A visit of short duration may lead to a prescription that does not treat the underlying cause, but merely masks the symptom(s). The length of the visit is also important to help identify and diagnose other potentially serious disorders.

The process also helps to prevent more serious illnesses from occurring. Most people find the experience to be exceptionally positive and educational.