

Welcome, International Journal of Naturopathic Medicine

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With tens of thousands of medical journals currently being published, one might rightly question the value of adding another one. For a journal that focuses specifically on naturopathic medicine, however, the potential benefit to the medical profession and to the public health is significant. Naturopathy embodies an approach to healthcare that is frequently more effective, safer, and less expensive than what conventional medicine has to offer.

Whenever I have spoken at a naturopathic medical conference and asked the members of the audience, "How many of you routinely hear from your patients that they have seen many doctors, but you are the only one that helped them," nearly every hand in the room has gone up. I knew the hands would go up, because in my own medical practice, which includes many of the components of naturopathic medicine, my patients frequently comment that I am the only doctor who ever helped them.

Despite its many successes, however, some of the specific treatments being used by naturopaths probably deserve to be entombed in the dustbin of history. Just because the medical establishment and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration are against a particular treatment doesn't mean it works. And, just because a treatment has been used for many years does not automatically mean it works, either.

The creation of a journal designed to examine naturopathic medicine will help us learn more about which treatments are effective and which are not. It has been argued that it is difficult to subject naturopathic medicine to scientific scrutiny,

because its treatments are usually individualized and have multiple components. As such, the naturopathic model cannot always be tested with double-blind, placebo-controlled trials. We must not forget, however, that one of the definitions of science is "the acquisition of knowledge through observation." Many of us have helped patients recover from diseases that rarely, if ever, respond to conventional therapies. Such cases are often "reportable," provided that the diagnosis is well established and that the course of treatment and clinical outcome are clearly documented. It is also useful to report negative results; i.e., "I've tried this popular or heavily promoted treatment on ten consecutive patients and none of them got better." Taking the time to write up one's best cases, and one's negative results, is a service to the medical community and to the public. Practitioners are invited to teach us what they know, and those who are in a position to do controlled studies are encouraged to do them.

When I was a medical student, I asked one of my professors what would be the most effective way to improve the medical system. His answer was to write, and to keep writing, and then to write some more. That wise man's words are still true today, so I pass on his advice with that famous 70's affirmation, "Write on!"