

Naturopathy and nutritional medicine

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In this essay I will look at nutritional medicine and naturopathy, and discuss how they have evolved into their present status. I will describe similarities and differences and address how history, culture and philosophy have shaped them. Nutritional medicine is the use of food and nutritional supplements to prevent and treat disease. It is based on the scientific study of nutrition, researching the nutritional content of food and how it contributes to optimal health. Nutrition is fundamental to health as it promotes wellbeing and decreases the risk of developing acute and chronic illnesses (Sardesai 2012, p.). Naturopathy is a holistic healing system, focussing on natural agents (i. e. air, water, heat, food, herbs) and therapies (i. e. electrotherapy, physiotherapy, psychotherapy) and excluding the use of drugs and surgery. The core principle is that all beings possess a Vital Force, the self-regulatory ability to heal which is supported and enhanced by naturopathic medicine (Sherwood 2005, pp. 156-158). From those descriptions it is obvious that nutritional medicine is an integral part of naturopathy.

In fact, naturopathy considers proper nutrition and dietary routines important building blocks to health which are the foundations to prevention of disease and promotion of health (Lloyd 2009, p. 46). Appendix, table 1 identifies further similarities and differences between these two modalities. Principles for nutritional medicine and naturopathy can be traced back to ancient practices. References for the use of food as medicine can be found in ancient medical texts of Egypt that describe the use of animal, vegetable and mineral substances as medicine to treat diseases (Di Stefano 2006, p. 5).

Although the term naturopathy stems from the late 19th century, its philosophical beginnings can also be found in Egypt with the earliest written records of healing practices. The supernatural approach to medicine and the belief that disease is caused by angered gods, evil spirits or demons was characteristic for this period. Patients were treated holistically, both on a spiritual level including religious ritual, and on an empirical level by using food and medicinal plants with healing power (Seaton 2012, p. 2).