



Naturopathy and Public Health in Ghana: A Qualitative inquiry on the Relationship by Students of Naturopathy

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Abstract

Original Research Article

Background: In juxtaposing Naturopathy to Public health, there is the tendency that, one would find similarities between the two systems of medical practices. For instance, Public health engages health education, promotion and many others. These are intertwined with the naturopathic principles as well. This study therefore evaluates whether there is a link between Naturopathy and Public Health practices from the perspective of Naturopathic Medical Students as well as their knowledge and understanding of both Public Health and Naturopathy using a qualitative study. **Methods:** A qualitative descriptive drafted questionnaire was sent to ten (10) Second Year Diploma in Naturopathic Medical Students through WhatsApp at the Nyarkotey College of Holistic Medicine, Tema, Community, 7, Ghana. The students have also studied Public health as a component of their Naturopathy program. Their feedbacks were abstracted and analyzed thematically. **Findings:** The significant statements extracted from their feedbacks emphasized their knowledge and understanding on both Naturopathy and Public health issues. They explained that, juxtaposing the principles that existed in Naturopathic profession as well as public health, the two professions are intertwined. **Conclusion:** Public health is indeed embedded in naturopathic principles. This is because in public health, the core function is defined as the science of protecting, preventing and promotion of the health of the people and their communities. It is also governed by some principles such as empowerment, counseling, collaboration and education. Hence, given the definition and principles that governs public health and naturopathy; one can argue that, public health is deeply rooted in naturopathy as a whole.

Keywords: Naturopathy, public health, principles, rooted, students.

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INTRODUCTION

Naturopathy and public health have many things in common. These include a focus on health rather than disease, a preventive approach, and an emphasis on health promotion and health education[1]. Others have further opined that, Public health can take pride in naturopathy to deal with the many health issues in the 21st healthcare industry especially in the primary prevention of several diseases [1].

With regards to definition, Public Health (PH) is defined as [2], ‘the science and art of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting health through the organized efforts and informed choices of society,

organizations, public and private, communities and individuals.

On the other hand, the principles of naturopathy also entails disease prevention, education on healthy lifestyle, allowing the body to heal itself without interference, employing natural therapies[3]. Juxtaposing the two, one could easily see the connection between Naturopathy and Public Health [1].

In recent times, others have called on a national policy on Naturopathy and public health at the primary healthcare level to deal with the rising cases of Non Communicable diseases (NCD’s) globally due to cost-effectiveness and efficacy [4]. Another study

opined that, policy makers have a huge role to play in recognition of Naturopathy in public health [5]. There have been further calls for future research into Naturopathy and public health for further integration at the primary healthcare level [6]. We therefore assess students of Naturopathy's knowledge and understanding on Naturopathy and Public health in this study using Ghana as a case model.

METHODOLOGY

Study design and setting

This is a qualitative study based on descriptive phenomenology, involving a purposive sampling of Naturopathic Medical Students at Nyarkotey College of Holistic Medicine, Tema, Community, Ghana. The qualitative approach was adopted because it allowed the researchers to obtain an in-depth explanation of the root of public health and Naturopathic principles based on respondents' narratives.

Naturopathic Medical Students recruitment

This current study involved selected Naturopathic Medical Students at level 200 studying Diploma in naturopathic Medicine, who have studied Public health as well in Naturopathy. This current study recruited Ten (10) students of Naturopathy. The study, however, excluded level 100 Naturopathy students who just began their study journey. The selection was done using purposive sampling from the Nyarkotey College of Holistic Medicine, Tema, Community, 7, Ghana. The students were provided with an open-ended questionnaire drafted with enough space available to express their views. We further had to contact them on telephone and on the WhatsApp platform to explain to them the significance of this work. Out of the Ten (10) recruited, Seven (7) submitted their responses and when the time allocated to them elapses data were analyzed. Out of the seven, we used only three feedbacks for this case study. The following were asked on the questionnaire:

- Is Public health rooted in Naturopathic Principles?

DATA COLLECTION

Data collection was done using an open-ended drafted questionnaire sent to the 10 respondents via the WhatsApp platform. This process allowed the respondents to expatiate their opinions on their profession. The data collection commenced from April and ended in May, 2021. Respondents sent their feedbacks via WhatsApp and others used the researchers' emails.

Findings

This section analyses the respondent's narratives for the qualitative case study. 7 respondents submitted their feedbacks. However, we reviewed the feedbacks and abstracted them as majority of their responses were similar. We therefore selected three

narratives for this section. We adopted Pseudonyms to help protect respondents' anonymity.

Is Public health rooted in Naturopathy?

Yaw writes:

"Public health is indeed embedded in naturopathic principles. This is because in public health, the core function is defined as the science of protecting, preventing and promotion of the health of the people and their communities. It is also governed by some principles that is empowerment, counseling, collaboration and education".

He further explained: "Ultimately, it is aimed at changing the behavior of people to adopt a healthier lifestyle". Juxtaposing this to Naturopathy, he notes: "Naturopathy is defined as the embodiment of all natural systems of healing". He juxtaposed this assertion to the following.

Naturopathy principles

- Do no harm – it is expected the naturopaths try a much as possible not to harm their patients in an attempt to treat them.
- Cooperate with the healing power of nature – naturopathy employs therapies that will enhance the innate healing ability of the body
- Treat the underlining cause of the disease – unlike other systems of healing, naturopaths investigate and look for the root cause of the underline condition before treating.
- Treat patients individually – treatment in naturopathic system of healing is unique to every patient. Because it is believed that there are variations in how patients respond to treatment.
- Teach patients a healthy living – every naturopathic doctor is a teacher and it important to teach all patients to adopt a healthy active lifestyle which is why naturopaths are trained to practice preventive medicine.

In conclusion, yaw, asserts that: "Given the definition and principles that govern public health and naturopathy, one can argue that, public health is deeply rooted in naturopathy as a whole".

Kofi

On his part of the argument, he notes:

"Public Health is the science and art of protecting and improving the health of communities through education, promotion of healthy lifestyles, and research for disease and disease prevention".

He further argued that "The principles of public health comprise of health promotion, education and prevention whilst naturopathic principles also include the Doctor as a teacher which means physicians

should be teachers to their patients by educating them on healthy lifestyle choices, so this clearly states that public health is rooted in naturopathic principles because they both involve health education”.

Furthermore, he explained that “another principle of public health involves health prevention which refers to the actions aimed at avoiding the manifestation of diseases. This may include actions to improve health through changing the impact of social and economic determinants on health, whilst the principles of naturopathic medicine also involve prevention. As a naturopathic physician it is important to practice preventative medicine in the healing process this makes public health and naturopathic medicine closely related. In conclusion public health is rooted in naturopathic principles”.

Kojo

He is of the opinion that, “Public health deals with the science and art of preventing disease, prolonging life and improving quality of life through organized efforts and informed choices of society, organizations, communities and individuals”.

Additionally, Public health entails with;

- i. Educating the people (patients)
- ii. Prevention of diseases
- iii. Controlling of diseases

On the other hand, “Naturopathy is a system of alternative medicine that employs the array of practices branded as “natural”, “non-invasive”, or promoting “self-healing”. He further explained that, “The ideology and methods of naturopathy are based on vitalism and folk medicine, rather than evidence based medicine”.

Juxtaposing the two, he notes: “These are principles of naturopathy which intertwine with public health which are as follows:

- i. First do no harm
- ii. Identify and treat the cause
- iii. Treat the whole person
- iv. The healing power of nature
- v. The physician as teacher
- vi. Prevention.

He states: “I will go for the motion that public health is rooted in naturopathy, due to the principles of naturopathy:

First do no harm-A naturopathic doctor uses the most natural therapies at his or her disposal and avoids more invasive and toxic treatments when not medically indicated, which goes in the same direction as how public health investigate disease before treating to prevent causing harm.

“Identify and treat the causes”, “treat the whole person” -A naturopathic doctor views the whole

body as an integrated whole in all its physical and psychospiritual dimensions and also looks beyond the symptoms to the underlying cause.

Doctor as a teacher- A naturopathic doctor educates patients on how to maintain their health through protection.

Prevention -A naturopathic doctor’s main aim is to prevent patients from getting diseases, with the help of exercising, massage, yoga and other nutritional values.

The healing power of nature- Naturopathic doctors work as partners with their patients to restore the body’s inherent wisdom to heal.

He added: “Public health is rooted in naturopathy using the principle of naturopathy as an example”.

CONCLUSIONS

We observed that, indeed, public health and naturopathic profession are analogous. Once they are analogous, Naturopathy and mainstream medicine can coexist to improve the quality of life of patients. We believe as well that, Naturopathy should be included as a core subject in mainstream health training programs to get themselves acquainted with Naturopathic profession as well especially in Ghana and Africa. We finally call for national policy to integrate Naturopathic medicine into public health at the primary healthcare level.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical consideration for this case study research was obtained from the Registrar of Nyarkotey College of Holistic Medicine, Tema Community, 7, Ghana.

Conflict of Interest

We declare that there is no conflict of interest in terms of ownership of shares, consultancy, speaker’s honoraria or research grants from commercial companies or professional or governmental organizations with an interest in the topic of the paper.

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