



The Ordeal of the Naturopathic Doctor and the Challenges in Naturopathic Medical Practice: The Case of Ghana

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DOI: N/A

| Received: 09.09.2020 | Accepted: 19.10.2020 | Published: 05.12.2020

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Abstract

Original Research Article

Naturopathy Medicine is a new system of Medical practice gaining popularity in Ghana. Naturopathy uses science to bridge the gap between Conventional Medicine and Traditional Medicine through the Four Learning Areas of Science, which includes all the Basic and Medical Sciences like Anatomy, Physiology, Biochemistry, Microbiology as well as Pharmacology, Pathology, Medicine, Pharmacognosy, etc. This notwithstanding, the practice of Naturopathic Medicine has many challenges in Ghana as a new emerging medical practice. This paper investigates the challenges in the practice of Naturopathy and other alternative medicines in Ghana. Twenty (20) Naturopathic Medical Students were asked to write three challenges they faced in their Naturopathy and other alternative medicines during a class lecture on Naturopathy. In their result, the predominant issues raised by the students were regulatory issues in Ghana and limited Universities or training institutions to teach Naturopathic students. Other pressing challenges were insufficient government support to push alternative remedies, efficacy of natural products coupled with manufacturing compliance, cost of usage of natural products by patients, unhealthy challenges with medical fraternity and uniformity in Naturopathic association. In conclusion, practitioners of naturopathic medicines faced many challenges in Ghana and there is the need for the regulatory body, The Traditional and Alternative Medicine of the Ministry of Health to help raised the standards in the practice of Naturopathy Medicine. This can be achieved with government support to have the new Traditional and Alternative Medicine bill pending passed.

Key words: Naturopathy, Regulations, Alternative Medicines, Bill, training.

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INTRODUCTION

The revolution and advocacy of the practice of Naturopathic and holistic Medicine sufficed into the system due to the promotion and advocacy work of Nyarkotey College of Holistic Medicine, an accredited Naturopathic Medical School by the Traditional and Alternative Medicine Practice Council of Ghana.

The Traditional Medicine Practice Council (TMPC), as then was, established based on Traditional Medicine Practice ACT 575. The aim of the act is to establish a Council to regulate the practice of traditional medicine, to register practitioners and license practices, to regulate the preparation and sale of herbal, medicines and to provide for related matters. The challenge with the act was defining who is a Traditional Medicine Practitioner. Section 13 of the act states that “The Minister, on the recommendations of the Board given in consultation with the Association, may, prescribe by

Regulations the titles to be used by practitioners based on the type of service rendered and the qualifications of the practitioners.” This is the legal basis of titles prescribed by the council to practitioners [1].

An Alternative Medicine cannot be considered as a Traditional Medicine Practice as the practice relating to alternative medicine is an imported practice into Ghana. Alternative Medicine is defined as any practice that is outside the scope of conventional or allopathic medicine and Traditional Medicine. The likes of Naturopathy, Homeopathy, Chiropractic, Acupuncture and many others are example of alternative medicines. Hence, policy makers realize the need to includes alternative medicines into the country and merges with the Traditional Medicine based on ministerial directives and eventually led to the new Traditional and Alternative Medicine Practice Council pending the promulgation of the Traditional and Alternative Medicine bill, which started in 2014.

METHODOLOGY

About twenty (20) Naturopaths who took part in a short course were asked to write down three (3) challenges they assume if facing the practice of Naturopathy and alternative medicines in Ghana. The students' results were further grouped into ten (10) areas and tabulated into this result form.

RESULTS

A total of sixty (60) issues were raised in their reports submitted which were further grouped into ten (10) thematic areas. The following are the Students Opinions on Naturopathy Practice Challenges in Ghana. Some issues raised were rejected as they were outside the scope of this profession. A total of thirty (31) issues met the criteria for analysis.

Table-1: Challenges students raised in their naturopathic practice and the number who shared the same sentiment

Challenges raised by the Students	Number of students who shared the same opinion
Limited Training Schools/ Universities	8
Association Challenges	2
Cost of usage	1
Regulation issues	10
Right dosage use	
Lack of government support	8
Challenges with other care providers	1
Association with fetishism	1
Total	31

Ten (10) students were of the opinion that regulation issues were the major challenge in the practice of naturopathic and alternative medicine in Ghana. The regulation had to do with the Traditional and Alternative Medicine Practice Council of the Ministry of Health to be able to set standards and enforce them to bring sanity into the industry. The regulation had to do with standards set by the regulating body in licensing, education and titles given to the practitioners.

Eight (8) students concurrently, are of the opinion that lack of government support and universities or training schools to adopt naturopathy to train students is hampering the industry. The further lack of educational institution to train naturopath is creating a huge knowledge gap in the industry which creates room for unprofessionalism. The same applies to government neglect of the industry which could create huge market value is neglected. The pending Traditional and Alternative Medicine bill which started in 2014 is still at crossroad to be passed into law to help official recognition of the industry into the healthcare system in Ghana. This was administered by the government in the wake of the outbreak of the novel coronavirus in 2019 when the government did nothing to support traditional and alternative medicine. They believe, the novel coronavirus pandemic was the perfect time for the government support or acceptance of natural remedies into the system, however, the government failed to recognize it.

Association challenges was also raised by two (2) respondents. They believe that, there is no uniformity in the association and each and every one is forming an association which creates a huge gap in the industry. The same cannot be said in the conventional

sector, where there is a uniform association every practitioner belongs, hence, there is an order! Associations are able to set their own standards and regulates their practitioners very well if it is well managed, hence, that cannot be said in Ghana's case. There are many springs associations in natural remedies.

Other challengers raised are association of the practice with fetishism. They argued that, people assumed that practitioners of natural medicines have something to do with this practice due to ancient believes and some fetish people in the industry. Efficacy of natural remedies have also been raised coupled with manufacturing compliance and acceptance of their practice by other healthcare professionals.

DISCUSSIONS

Interesting, while some hospitals and clinics are now putting out banners for integrative medicine and offering acupuncture, massage, nutrition, and other treatments, they are doing so without being taught about them in medical school as part of an integrative model for medicine. Acupuncture, for example, has been accepted on the basis of its use in pain management and stimulation of endorphins, but without regard for the basic concepts of the five elements and ch'i in Chinese medicine. While naturopathic doctors are trained in natural medicine, homeopathy, nutrition, and other natural remedies, they typically use an allopathic and Western philosophy-based approach [2].

According to Dr. Paul Droiun, in order to be successful in implementing integrative medicine, it will be necessary to address the following five main challenges:

Challenge 1: The current healthcare crisis and unsustainable rising healthcare costs.

Solution 1: Provide alternative protocols, particularly for people who cannot afford surgery or pharmaceuticals.

Challenge 2: Lack of recognition by medical boards of the use of alternative therapies.

Solution 2: The creation of a new paradigm of integrative medicine based on the science of quantum physics, to be taught at medical schools.

Challenge 3: Limited view of human anatomy which considers only the visible physical anatomy.

Solution 3: Establish recognition of an expanded view of the anatomy of a human body by providing the scientific basis for understanding the mind-body connection and subtle energy fields.

Challenge 4: Client evaluation limited to symptoms.

Solution 4: Develop new approaches to client evaluation and diagnosis using additional tools of investigation in order to provide a holistic view of the person.

Challenge 5: Limited disease-based model of medicine.

Solution 5: Redefine a model for modern medicine based on the principles of quantum physics that creates a new environment for healing focused not on disease but on how to optimize the full potential of the human being.

For him, Integrative medicine is not just a new cosmetic name for complementary alternative medicine; that term should also imply the premise of inclusion of conventional medicine. The responsibility for medical universities in the future will be to include in their curriculum the essential knowledge of a more complex understanding of the fabric of the reality of the human being, one based on an understanding of the science of quantum physics and a philosophy of potential versus fatality.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in the new era of naturopathic medicine, the onus falls on the regulatory body, the Traditional and Alternative Medicine Practice of the Ministry of Health, Ghana to help set standards and streamline the practice to bring confidence into the public health care system.

Conflict of interest: None.

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