



Qualitative Review on Naturopathic Medical Students' Perspective on Vaccination and Naturopathy Practice in Ghana

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Abstract

Original Research Article

Background: The issue of vaccination in the COVID -19 pandemic has become a controversial topic in Ghana. Vaccination and Naturopathy are analogous as enshrined in public health principles, and Naturopathic students study public health as a discipline. However, there are many people in Ghana who refer to themselves as Naturopathic Doctors but do not believe in Naturopathy embracing public health tenets such as vaccination. Are vaccines naturopathy as well? **Objectives:** This case study examines knowledge and awareness of vaccines in Naturopathic practice amongst Naturopathic Medical Students in Ghana. **Methods:** The study adopted a qualitative approach using a drafted questionnaire to collect primary data from the respondents for the study. The questionnaire entailed a set of questions administered to about ten (10) respondents. The respondents in this study were selected Naturopathic Medical Students of Nyarkotey College of Holistic Medicine, Ghana. **Results:** The Naturopathic medical students unanimously agreed that vaccines are part of the Naturopathic profession, and are in line with Naturopathic principles. Interestingly, out of the 10 respondents, only one took the COVID-19 vaccine in Ghana representing. The remaining, however, expressed interest in taking the jab; but are monitoring the side effects for a while before they take a final decision on the vaccine. **Conclusion:** There is sufficiently good knowledge and understanding on vaccines in the practice of Naturopathy by the Naturopathic Medical students. The respondents understood that, vaccines are part of the practice of Naturopathy and public health in general and thus, are not against public health protocols in global pandemic.

Keywords: Naturopathic medicine, vaccines, public health, Ghana, Naturopathic students.

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INTRODUCTION

In Ghana, there appear to be some misgivings by some Naturopathic practitioners who have not received sound accredited Naturopathic education. They have different mindsets about vaccination programs. This is however, not the case in modern naturopathy as accredited naturopathic curricula have public health education embedded. NPS MedicineWise[1], defined Vaccination as “treatment with a vaccine (usually by injection) that helps the immune system prepare to fight a future infection”. It emphasizes that,

“Vaccines often contain tiny amounts of dead or weakened viruses or bacteria, or parts of

them. Some vaccines contain inactivated toxins that are produced by disease-causing bacteria. Once in the body, the immune system will react to the vaccine without you actually experiencing the disease. This reaction also means that if the same disease-causing organism comes in contact with your immune system in the future, your body is able to quickly make antibodies that can stop the disease from making you sick”.

Some vaccines need to be administered more than once [1], to help the immune system deal with actual infection in the future, whilst others are seasonal vaccines which are administered in a short duration as the organism can mutate at any time. Vaccination and immunization also present some kind of controversies.

In explaining the distinction between the two terminologies, NPS MedicineWise[1], agrees that, immunization is the resultant effect of what triggers after vaccine introduced into the body. The introduction of the vaccine acts as a catalyst and stimulates the immune system to be able to recognize the disease and protect the individual from prospective infection. However [1], agrees that, ‘Vaccination’ and ‘immunization’ are often used interchangeably but their meanings are not exactly the same. Obu, [2], is of the opinion that modern naturopathy is not against vaccination. His position[2] is in support of a retrospective article by Swanson[3], which agrees that, vaccines, even for children are naturopathic. The College of Naturopathic Physicians of British Columbia which regulates the practice of naturopathic medicine in British Columbia [4], is against Naturopathic doctors who advise patient against vaccination. The College is of the view that, any Naturopathic doctor who advises against vaccination is causing harm and injury which breaches the Naturopathic principles of “do no harm”. Though there is a general notion that mainstream doctors and health workers have the knowledge with regards to vaccination and immunization programs [5], there are some health workers who are of the view the Naturopathic doctors and other alternative medical practitioners have the objective views on vaccinations, hence, seek for advice and recommendation from them, Opel et al[6]. Hence, COVID-19 pandemic presents another challenge in Ghana for some naturopathic doctors and other alternative practitioners to campaign against the current government public health program.

Generally, as there is significant hesitancy on the part of the Ghanaian public against vaccination. The same exists on the part of some naturopathic and other alternative practitioners [7]. We believe that the success of any vaccination or public health programs in Africa and Ghana specifically, depends on incorporating Naturopathic doctors and other alternative medicine practitioners, as they are integral part of the healthcare team and serve as a source of healthcare related advice for the general populace.

There is no doubt that Naturopathic doctors start their Naturopathic education studying public health, usually with an open mind approach about vaccination. They are later on influenced by many formal and informal negative ideas about vaccination, McMurtry et al., [8]. A critical example is a 2010 study which demonstrated that chiropractors’ behavior toward vaccination were based on the college or universities ideas from which they had their training, and they believe that public health diseases can be dealt with using spinal manipulations. Hence, there is no need for vaccines, McGregor et al[9]. We therefore examined the perception of Naturopathic Medical Students who have now received sound accredited naturopathic education at the Nyarkotey College of Holistic Medicine in Ghana in this research.

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 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 which provided them with enough space to express their views. We further had to contact them on telephone, Whatsapp platforms 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 elapsed, data was analyzed. The following were asked on the questionnaire:

1. Tell us a little about Yourself and Professional Journey in naturopathy
2. Would you get vaccinated as a Naturopathic Medical Student?
3. What is your view about vaccination as a Naturopathic Medical Student?

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

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Stacy

Stacy is a Naturopathic Medical student at Nyarkotey College of Holistic Medicine Pursing

Diploma in Naturopathic Medicine and currently on her clinical training program at the Tema General Hospital. She has been in the Naturopathy business for over five years. She intends to practice general Naturopathic Medicine in her future Naturopathy profession.

On her view on vaccination as a Naturopathic Medical Student, she agrees that she is ready to accept the job and would advise parents to immunize their babies from her assessment at the pediatrics department at the government hospital.

The second respondent is Kwame

Kwame is a registered and licensed complementary healthcare practitioner under the regulations of TMPC of the ministry of health of Ghana. He is currently a student of Nyarkotey University College of Holistic Medicine, the first premier and fastest growing Private holistic medical school in Ghana.

He writes: “Vaccines are means of improving our immunity, it has ended a lot of illnesses such as the six childhood killer diseases, which have decline drastically due to vaccines”.

Yakubu

His journey in naturopathy started way back with his grandfather, a well-known herbalist in the village. On the issue with regards to vaccination as a Naturopathic Medical Student, he is also ready to get the job and would also advise parents to immunize their babies as well. He notes: “I think it aids the body in fending off certain basic health challenges hence, I would advise parents to immunize their children”.

Mensah

Mensah believes that his professional journey in naturopathy is a promising one in the sense that, the education on natural medicine is gradually gaining grounds and most people are showing interest in little or no chemical treatment protocol and its low cost. His confidence that naturopathic treatment is science based, is a significant step for his future practice.

Mensah is also of the view that he will get the COVID 19 vaccination as a Naturopathic Medical Student. As a result of this, he believes that, “Vaccination is to protect and boost the immune system from any foreign attack on one’s immunity, therefore it is very important to immunize children to keep them safe”.

CONCLUSIONS

We conclude from the analysis that sound Naturopathic education is paramount in Ghana for public health purposes. This was manifested in the respondents’ narratives as they demonstrate the significance of vaccination and immunization programs. Naturopathy and vaccination are siblings. This is due to

the fact that, both have the same principles to avert prospective diseases. However, many factors contribute to the negative perception naturopathic doctors have against vaccination. We believe that in Ghana and Africa, in order for there to be success in any vaccination or public health programs, there is the need to incorporate Naturopathic doctors and other alternative medicine practitioners as they are integral part of the healthcare team. Leaving Naturopathic Doctors behind out of any Vaccine Deployment is suicidal to any government healthcare policy on public health and vaccination.

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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