



## Naturopathy in Ghana and Students Perception towards the Profession

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### Abstract

### Original Research Article

**Background:** In Ghana, Naturopathy education and practice is relatively new with the Nyarkotey College of Holistic Medicine currently being the leader and crusader of promoting modern Naturopathic medicine. This study explored the perception about Naturopathic Medicine on the part of Naturopathic Medical Students prior to enrolling to study modern Naturopathy at the Nyarkotey College of Holistic Medicine as well as their recent perception as advanced students. **Methods:** A qualitative descriptive drafted questionnaire was sent to ten (10) Second Year Diploma in Naturopathic Medical Students through WhatsApp. The students were on their clinical Clerkship at the Tema General Hospital. Their feedbacks were abstracted and analyzed thematically. **Findings:** The significant statements extracted from their feedbacks produced two main themes relating to Naturopathy prior to enrolling to study Naturopathy; i. They thought Naturopathy was just about herbal medicine as pertains to the Ghanaian jurisdiction; ii. Naturopathy has a narrow scope of practice with no science. Post enrolling; they opined that; i. Naturopathy is more than using herbal medicine, ii. Naturopathy is jurisdictional. **Conclusion:** They have come to the realization that; modern Naturopathy is not what they perceived it to be before enrolling to study at Nyarkotey College of Holistic Medicine. They further understand that, Naturopathy is the general practice of evidence based natural medicines. Those who thought they knew Naturopathy before enrolling, have practically realized that, they were in the dark then.

**Keywords:** Naturopathy, education, legitimization, Profession, Nyarkotey College.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Naturopathic profession is fairly new in the Ghanaian jurisdiction. There are many who hold the notion that, naturopathic medicine means herbal medicine in Ghana. This, however, is far from the truth about the naturopathic profession. Smith and Logan [1], defined Naturopathic medicine as “an eclectic form of primary health care that encompasses many complementary modalities in the treatment and prevention of disease. Treatment protocols are integrative in nature, combining the most suitable therapies to address the individual patient's needs”.

This means that, herbal medicine as perceived in Ghana is just one form or modality of Naturopathic remedies practitioners can employ in the treatment

regime. Naturopathic medicine is very broad in scope and employs all available natural medicines.

The practice of naturopathy is also jurisdictional. For instance, Fleming & Gutknecht [2], explained that, modalities such as diet and clinical nutrition, behavioral change, hydrotherapy, homeopathy, botanical medicine, physical medicine, pharmaceuticals, and minor surgery are employed in some jurisdictions. For areas such as North America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and others where Naturopathic doctors are recognized, they are trained as primary care physicians in four-year, accredited doctoral-level naturopathic medical schools. The situation is different in Ghana where naturopathy is now developing. Naturopathic education in Ghana is being championed by the Nyarkotey College of Holistic

Medicine[3] and hopes to streamline the practice of Naturopathy in Ghana and Africa. The college further received World Naturopathic Federation (WNF) educational recognition in 2021[4]. We therefore examine Naturopathic Medical Students perception about the profession prior to enrolling to study Naturopathy at Nyarkotey College of Holistic Medicine as well as their current knowledge.

## 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. Qualitative study was adopted because, it allowed the researchers to obtain in-depth explanations of the students' perception of the Naturopathic Medical Students and an extensive narrative on Naturopathic medicine in their professional journey.

### Naturopathic Medical Students recruitment

This current study's respondents involved selected Naturopathic Medical Students at level 200 studying Diploma in Naturopathic Medicine. Some are on their Clinical clerkship at the Tema General Hospital as part of their six months conventional medical training and exposure. This current study recruited Ten (10) students of Naturopathy. The study, however, excluded level 100 Naturopathy students who just entered into 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 the open-ended questionnaire 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 elapsed, data was analyzed. The following were asked on the questionnaire:

- Tell us your perception about Naturopathic Medicine before enrolling to study at Nyarkotey College of Holistic Medicine; and
- What is your current perception now at level 200 as Naturopathic a student on clerkship?

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

### Kwame

He writes: "The first time Naturopathic medicine was introduced to me, I enjoyed the concept, but I realized I needed to acquire more knowledge about the concept since is something new to me. So I continued with the research. Also my initial knowledge on Naturopathic medicine was not emphasized on scientific aspect of the naturopathic medicine concept. But now my observation is that, Naturopathic medicine does not function without a science base. Due to this observation, I have decided to research and embrace new science based discoveries to upgrade myself and enhance my practice as a Naturopath".

### Abena

"I previously linked Naturopathy to quackery as promoted by the Medical community. However, my perception has completely changed after enrolling to study Naturopathic Medicine at Nyarkotey College of Holistic Medicine. The quack mentality as promoted by the medical community is now being exposed by the real Naturopathic education in Ghana through the Nyarkotey Naturopathic institution in Ghana. The intensive training instituted by the Nyarkotey Naturopathic institution in Ghana has enlightened the insight of many natural therapeutic practitioners to have a better understanding of nature's cure".

According to Abena, "the principles of the Naturopathic practice have been a systematic approach helping practitioners in their field of practice in better understanding of natural therapeutics and treatment for optimal results."

She now believes that, Naturopathic medicine practice has strengthened alternative healthcare in Ghana. She opined: "The disregard for natural therapeutics was rising up in the field of healthcare, as every credit was given to conventional sectors, but now, there has been a regard for natural therapeutics, by the well instilled knowledge that Naturopathic practitioners are manifesting in their fields of healthcare. Naturopathic medicine practice in Ghana is gradually becoming a second hope for healthcare and life saving centers in Ghana. The naturopathic education and impartation of knowledge, skill and principle, is ranking the Naturopathic sector in healthcare higher among the other natural therapeutics. Unlike the previous days where natural therapeutic practitioners used to apply medicines without any proper diagnosis, Naturopathy is making a difference in

Ghana now, on its field of natural therapeutics and healthcare delivery. Naturopathic medicine includes the use of proper modern diagnostic equipment's in its healthcare for optimal results".

### **Paa**

"I thought naturopathy was only based on supplementary drugs as well as herbal or traditional medicine in Ghana. I also thought it was more of a foreign based practice which was different from the normal herbal medicine. Now, I am much informed about how Naturopathy focuses on disease prevention as well as uses natural therapy treatments to cure and manage diseases. Naturopathic treatment treats patients as individuals by addressing the physical, environmental, lifestyle, attitudinal, and emotional aspects of health".

### **Adoa**

"In the olden days the practice of naturopathic medicine in Ghana was only herbal and traditional based therapies. There were no structures and rules guarding naturopathic medicine practitioners in Ghana in the olden days. Now, I know Naturopathic medicine is a system that uses natural remedies to help the body heal itself. It embraces many therapies such as herbs, massage, acupuncture, exercise, and life style counseling. Naturopathic medicine has been in existence for centuries. Naturopathic medicine in Ghana has involved as there is science backing it unlike the olden days. Naturopathic medicine in Ghana has improved a lot as most practitioners are getting formal education to back their practice"

### **AJO**

"I thought naturopathy was a much narrower practice. My perception has completely changed as upon studies, it has been unveiled that Naturopathy is much broader than I thought. This has exposed me to various alternative practices as well".

## **CONCLUSIONS**

We observed that in Ghana, there is general perception that, naturopathic medicine refers herbal and other African Traditional medicine practice. There is major lack of understanding and knowledge in the field of Naturopathy, practice, education and legislation as compared to other jurisdictions. This notwithstanding, we believe that Naturopathic Medical Students have

now realized the broader scope and nature of the naturopathic profession with the kind of zeal they have developed for the profession. We believe as the college progresses with national support, Naturopathy will be revered system of medical practice in Ghana as well as Africa.

### **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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