

Medical Traditions and Paradigms

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Our naturopathic medicine and acupuncture clinic has been open for two plus years. Through our involvement with the Tualatin Chamber of Commerce and our many patients we have become a connected part of the community. People who are not our patients seem to genuinely like us even though they don't always seem to understand what we do. Sometimes we hear comments like "its nice to have alternatives to traditional medicine in our community". Which is a kind, yet head scratching comment. A comment that motivates me to wade into murky waters with the hope to share some perspective on today's medical landscape from my point of view as a licensed naturopathic physician.

When someone says "traditional", to who's tradition are they referring? Traditional medicine from Europe includes the traditions of monks that preserved and improved the knowledge of herbal medicine through medieval times, a knowledge that survives today. Galen from the classical Greek period was both an herbalist and a surgeon. Galen is looked upon by all western medicine traditions as a founding father. The traditions that root modern acupuncture go back even farther to at least the bronze age. In N. America echinacea is a medicine with one of the longest histories of continuous use. Modern pharmaceutical medicine's tradition has some of the

shallowest roots. The advent of sulfa drugs in the early 20th century is often cited as the beginning of the modern drug era that is presently the dominant medical paradigm.

"Conventional" medicine is the term I prefer to use to identify the dominant paradigm of pharmaceutical drugs and surgery. Anything used as medicine instead of what is "conventional" is by definition an "alternative". Anything alternative that is used together with conventional medicine is labeled "complementary".

Naturopathic medicine has its roots deep in the western medical traditions, including the contemporary scientific basis of conventional medicine. In my medical school education we learned the same anatomy, physiology, biochemistry,

microbiology, laboratory, pathology, and pharmaceutical drugs as conventional doctors.

Conventionally, pharmaceutical drugs are often given as permanent prescriptions to manage symptoms. In 2008 48% of the US population was on one or more prescription drugs. Rightly or wrongly, Americans are the most medicated people in the world.

Naturopathic medicine is an alternative to conventional medicine in at least one very important way. We really, truly, put faith in the body's inherent desire to be healthy, and in its ability to heal and change for the better. We also see it as our duty as doctors to enable and encourage the body's processes that lead toward a restoration of

health. Naturopathic physicians view good nutrition and regular physical activity as the foundations of health. Naturopathic physicians use targeted nutrition to treat symptoms and to assist the body in restoring health. There are many occasions when a nutritional strategy is an alternative that can avoid prescription drug dependency and instead lead to a symptom free, true health. A nutrition prescription might be as simple as eating raw oats instead of taking Lipitor or as sophisticated as IV administered vitamins and trace minerals to speed healing after a serious accident with broken bones. Nutrition as medicine is as foundational to the paradigm of naturopathic medicine as prescription drugs are foundational to the paradigm of conventional medicine.

In our office patients can expect to be offered alternative, complementary and conventional treatments, a truly integrated approach to medicine. They can also expect to be referred to conventional medical specialists when appropriate and necessary. We are happy and proud to be a part of Tualatin.



Dr. Jeff Clark is a naturopathic physician with True Health Medicine, PC, a group practice in Tualatin serving the whole family with naturopathic primary care and acupuncture.

