

MAKING THE CUT : What Exactly Is Naturopathy?

By: Dr. William von Peters, N.M.D., Ph.N.

President, First National University of Naturopathy and Allied Sciences

Several weeks ago a researcher from a western University contacted me concerning First National University of Naturopathy as a part of a research project on the emergence of natural medicine.

As we spoke she asked me a question which is commonly batted about in Naturopathy today, and went something like this: “There are two types of Naturopathy. There is that of the Northwestern schools which espouse a medical paradigm, and then there is that of the correspondence schools which espouse that of a lower level of practice, more like that of a nutritional consultant.” She then asked me, “Which is your school?”

I responded, “I would like you to change your view. There are actually three positions, not two. There are the Northwestern schools which are not truly Naturopathic, but integrated medical, and are sometimes known within the profession as ‘M.D. Wannabees’.

“The Correspondence schools have, until fairly recently, while teaching a limited curriculum at least taught something of true Naturopathy. However, they view our scope of practice as that of a nutritional consultant with a few other modalities such as homeopathy and herbalism thrown in.

“Then there is the third position, which is that of First National University of Naturopathy. We were founded in 1911 and chartered by Act of Congress by the great Dr. Frederick W. Collins as the United States School of Naturopathy and became First National University in 1916. The U.S. School remains the parent of, and a college within, the University.

“Our position is that of historically accurate Naturopathic Medicine. We are not Allopathic or Integrated Medicalists, such as the Northwestern schools. Nor are we Minimalists, such as the Correspondence schools. Rather, we stand for true Naturopathy, also known as Naturopathic

Medicine, which means the full scope of practice as passed by Act of Congress and embodied in the Dictionary of Occupational Titles and its successor.

“We teach Naturopathy as it existed in its heyday of the 1920’s, 1930’s and 1940’s, when it was free to exist as a self-defined system of medicine, combined with the best of modern technology and science. It is integrated Naturopathic Medicine because we teach the integration of the various naturopathic modalities into Naturopathic practice. However, it is not allopathic or integrated medicalism.”

The researcher was astonished to learn that there were more than the two positions. At First National University we absolutely stand for true, historic Naturopathy. But what is the historical definition of true Naturopathy?

E. W. Cordingly in his “Principles and Practice of Naturopathy”¹ gives us a few definitions of Naturopathy in the 1920’s. Let us view them.

Dr. Benedict Lust:

Naturopathy to quote Dr. Benedict Lust, is a distinct school of healing, employing the beneficent agency of Nature’s forces, or water, air, sunlight, earthpower, electricity, magnetism, exercise, rest, proper diet, various kinds of mechanical treatment, mental and moral science. As none of these agents of rejuvenation can cure every disease (alone) the Naturopath rightly employs the combination that is best adapted to each individual case. The result of such ministrations is wholly beneficent. The prophylactic power of Nature’s finer forces, mechanical and occult, removes foreign or poisonous matter from the system, restores nerve and blood vitality, invigorates organs and tissues, and regenerates the entire organism.

Dr. J. E. Cummins :

¹ Cordingly, E. W. Principles and Practice of Naturopathy, 2nd ed. 1924.

Naturopathy is the science, art and philosophy of adjusting the frame-work, correcting the mental influences, and supplying the body with its needed elements.

Edward Earle Purinton:

“Naturopathy is the perfected Science of Human Wholeness, and it includes all agencies, methods, systems, regimes, practices and ideals of natural origin and divine sanction whereby human health may be restored, enhanced, maintained.”

All of these recognize the primacy of natural agents, although Purinton also includes divine sanction. Dr. Lust also notes, “As none of these agents of rejuvenation can cure every disease (alone) the Naturopath rightly employs the combination that is best adapted to each individual case.” That is to say, the Naturopath employs them eclectically as a Physician. It is interesting to note that the various modalities which are encompassed within the scope are not listed in these definitions.

Head of the American Naturopathic Association, Dr. Lust handpicked Dr. Frederick W. Collins, founder of the United States School and First National University and a great light of Naturopathy, to succeed him. Dr. Collins was known as the “Dean of Naturopathy of America” and “America’s Drugless Consulting Physician”. However, this did not come to pass, and Dr. Jesse Mercer Gehman became Lust’s successor as President of the ANA. He was succeeded in turn by Dr. Paul Wendel and Dr. Therese M. Schippell. As an aside, it is interesting to note that Dr. Wendel dedicated several of his works to “My friend and teacher, the late Dr. Frederick W. Collins, who taught Naturopathy and suffered persecution because of his belief in Naturopathy.”

It is to Dr. Wendel, and his work entitled “Standardized Naturopathy” that the Minimalists turn in an attempt to show that Naturopathy was never Naturopathic Medicine.

Consequently, we must here diverge from our main discussion to look at what exactly constitutes Naturopathic Medicine. Is it another name for full scope Naturopathy, or is it an allopathized bastardized Naturopathy as the Minimalists claim and the Integrated Medicalists practice?

One Minimalist organization states:

Personality conflicts as well as philosophical difference led to the split. The Eastern naturopaths were determined to follow the example set forth by Kneipp et al., while those in the West seemed determined to “medicalize” naturopathy. “The two camps developed their own textbooks which showed their different points of view: Paul Wendel’s Standardized Naturopathy (1951) and Harry Riley Spittler’s Basic Naturopathy (1948).”²

If one bothers to actually read “Basic Naturopathy” there is nothing allopathic about it, nor is it in conflict with “Standardized Naturopathy”. To “medicalize” must be to “allopathize” the philosophy and treatment methodologies of Naturopathy. The point at which most Minimalists seek to delineate between what they term as “true” or “traditional” Naturopathy (and Naturopathic Medicine) is at the point of “minor surgery”. Why here? Because this is where the Minimalists see Naturopaths performing “invasive” procedures – and invasive procedures are to them the anathema of allopathized Naturopathy whereby Naturopathy becomes Naturopathic Medicine.

This fear is somewhat justified in that the Integrated Medicalists of the Northwestern schools have sought to turn minor surgery into something quite different from Naturopathic minor surgery. They argue that breast augmentation and vasectomies are minor surgery because a major body cavity is not penetrated. Further, they believe that they should prescribe synthetic drugs and narcotics and support standard medical understanding of disease as a function of germs. This is an allopathization, but it is that of Integrated Medicine, rather than Naturopathy.

Dr. Paul Wendel in his “Standardized Definition of Naturopathy” states:

“NATUROPATHY is defined as a scientific system of natural healing by a Naturopathic Physician, to diagnose, treat, prescribe for any human disease, pain, injury, deformity, for any physical, chemical or mental

²<http://www.naturalhealth.org/tradnaturo/history3.html>

condition through the use of AIR, WATER, LIGHT, HEAT, EARTH, FOOD and HERB THERAPY, ELECTROTHERAPY, PHYSIOTHERAPY, MINOR and ORIFICIAL SURGERY, MECHANO-THERAPY, NATUROPATHIC CORRECTIONS and ADJUSTMENTS, and all Natural Methods and Modalities; Natural Processed Foods, Herbs and Nature's remedies, which contains life and health elements or compounds which are components of body tissues, which has for its objects the maintaining of the body in, or restoring it to a state of normal health. Excluding the use of POISONOUS drugs, serums, injections, concoctions, major surgery, x-ray and radium for therapeutic purposes and unnecessary surgery or mutilations.”³

In another place in the same work he states: “Naturopathy does not make use of drugs or operative surgery.”⁴ The key word here is “operative”, which is the major surgery spoken of in his definition. Again, as a part of his listing of “The Naturopathic Arts and Sciences” we find under the heading “FOR THE TREATMENT OF DISEASE, Given by Hand With Instruments, Apparatus, etc., the term “minor surgery”.⁵ Further clarification of this point is found in his booklet, “A Brief Explanation of Naturopathy” he states: “Minor Surgery - - May be used by the Naturopath as he desires.” Certainly no condemnation there. Thus it is that minor surgery is firmly included as one of the modalities of the Naturopathic Physician by Dr. Wendel.

In fact, Naturopathy is not, and has never been, opposed to surgery, per se. It is opposed to surgery as an instrument of standard allopathic treatment of disease, which seeks to remove, rather than seeking to rebuild and repair, organs and glands. Consequently, Naturopathy has always supported the usage of reconstructive surgery and, in the last resort, the use of surgery to save lives. Dr. Wendel makes this clear when he says “some cases are not suited to naturopathic treatment or require emergency measures; such cases are promptly referred to

³ Wendel, Paul. Standardized Naturopathy. 1945, Forward unnumbered.

⁴ Ibid. p. 12.

⁵ Op cit. p. 26.

surgeons or specialists.”⁶ This is not in contradiction to his other statement, that Naturopathic Physicians (his term) believe in “The physical regeneration without drugs and without operations for strength, youth, health and beauty, preventative of premature aging by simply natural methods of healing and living, according to the laws of Nature.”⁷ Thus, one must properly understand the scope of the Naturopathic Physician, as well as his responsibilities to the patient and his well-being.

Dr. Henry Lindlahr, another of the fathers of American Naturopathy, states in this matter:

“By none of the statements made in this book do I mean to deny the necessity of combative methods under certain circumstances. What I wish to emphasize is that the allopathic school of medicine is spending too much of its effort along combative lines and not enough along preventive lines. It would be foolish to deny the necessity of surgery in traumatism and in abnormal conditions which require mechanical means of adjustment or treatment.

We further find in Lindlahr:

(20) What are the Natural Methods of Living and of treatment?

4. **Mechanical remedies**, such as corrective gymnastics, massage, magnetic treatment, structural adjustment and, and, in cases of accident, surgery.

So at this juncture we see that there are the two positions claimed by the two groups: 1) Naturopathy involves no invasive procedures, 2) Naturopathy is a more natural and more limited practice of allopathic medicine, along with 3) the true, historic definition of Naturopathy as defined by Drs. Lust, Wendel, Spittler and Kuts-Cheraux (below).

One Minimalist organization has stated:

Benedict Lust founded the American School of Naturopathy in 1901. Here students learned "basic sciences, physiotherapy, phytotherapy, geotherapy, electrotherapy, mechano-therapy. Degrees in naturopathy and chiropractic were

⁶ Op cit. p. 27.

⁷ Op cit. p. 37.

granted." Lust also established a school of massage and physiotherapy. In addition to class-room education, he offered naturopathic home-study courses through his journal.⁸

The point in this quote is not what they believe it to be. Rather, they note that from the beginning Lust taught electrotherapy — the therapeutic use of electricity. Electricity penetrates the skin and is therefore an invasive procedure. To be even more invasive, electrotherapy was used with orificial surgery — a bloodless and minor surgical modality using the hands, instruments, and electricity to correct problems in the nose, mouth, ears, rectum, vagina and uterus.

From the same source we find:

In 1947, in a speech before the Eastern ANA, Dr. Jesse Mercer Gehmann, president at the time, stated, "We need standards and we need more, to stand by them, once they are established.... These standards should insist upon a thorough training in basic Nature Cure. All students should be required to be thoroughly competent in applying the methods of the old Masters ...Our standards should include thorough training through study of Kneipp, Priessnitz, Just, Kuhne, Rikli, Trall, Schroth, Graham, Jennings, Lust and Macfadden ... We need adequate standards for entrance upon training for a Doctorate in Naturopathy, but these standards need NOT be, nor should they be patterned after the medical requirements. Our work is not based on a warped and decadent pathology, bacteriology, or biology (cited in Freibott 1990, #7)."⁹

Again, one may note that Dr. Gehmann stated a Naturopathic understanding of Disease. This understanding is that of Bechamps rather than Pasteur. His explanation of this is found in a Naturopath article entitled "Germ Theory vs. Microzymian Theory."¹⁰

Once again we see a differentiation from allopathic medicine, but nothing condemning Naturopathic Medicine, only a statement that the

⁸ op. cit.

⁹ op cit.

¹⁰ The Naturopath. February, 1940. p. 38, 48.

basis (origin) of Naturopathy is to be found in Nature Cure. But are we to remain there in Nature Cure? Perhaps the question can more adequately be stated as "Is Naturopathy the same as Nature Cure?"

The Father of American Naturopathy, Dr. Benedict Lust, answered this question early on in his article of 1902, "Naturopathy vs. Nature Cure", Dr. Lust states:

"Never mind—the Truth must out, and Naturopathy must disentangle itself from the chilling conception most people have, "that we and somebody's special patent Nature-Cure" are identical.

Naturopathy and Nature-Cure are distant relatives, it is true—so are the pussy and the tiger.

But they are not twins.

They don't even look alike. And the certainly don't act alike, or think alike. And yet we've been mistaken so often . . . that we must arise and differentiate.

. . . Now Naturopathy is no more "Nature-Cure" than a furniture-maker is a wood-chopper. Real Nature-Cure is the basis of Naturopathy, though not so deep or broad or high.

But Nature-Cure, as labeled by the German materialists and a few feeble imitators in this country, includes practically nothing but Water-Cure, Air Cure in a modified degree, and Food Cure in a general and unadapted regimen. Massage and Swedish Movements might perhaps be added.

Naturopathy, ideally at least, includes the following: Pure Love, Soul Marriage, Prenatal Culture, Painless Parturition, Passionless Fatherhood, Natural Babyhood, Child Culture, Astrology, Phrenology, Vocation Training, Individual Education, Higher Physical Culture, Dietetics, Hydrotherapy, Rejuvenative Breathing, Heliotherapy, Thermotherapy, Aerotherapy, Geotherapy, Osteopathy, Mechanotherapy, Electrotherapy, Hesukotherapy, Kneipp-Cure, Just-Cure, Magnetic, Mental and Divine Healing, Therapeutic Vibration, Suggestion and Hypnotism, New Thought, Self-Culture, Mental Regeneration, Physical

Immortalism, Spirit–Unfoldment, God–Consciousness.

There’s a difference—and please don’t call us “Nature–Cure” cranks again. We are not a therapeutic gadfly or an anti–medical mule.”¹¹

The September 1948 issue of *Herald of Health*, edited by Dr. T. M. Schippell, pg. 278, remarked concerning Naturopathy versus Nature Cure:

“...Think of the less than 50 Naturopaths who gathered dishearteningly at the so-called Golden Jubilee last year in New York City... What is more to the point this Salt Lake City Convention was a true Naturopathic get-together. It was really a physicians’ conclave. It certainly was nothing like that non-descript physical culture-vegetarian conglomeration of fads, fancies foibles and follies, with naturopathy crowded out, such as disgraced Naturopathy at the Hotel Commodore a year ago in July...”¹²

Dr. Kuts-Cheraux, editor of “*Naturae Medicina and Naturopathic Dispensatory*”, addresses this issue as well:

In passing, we must correct an injustice frequently indulged in and that is the classification of Naturopathy as a branch of so-called “drug-less healing.” To begin with, the term drugless physician is incongruous, since no true physician can be entirely non-drug for at some phases of his work he must use extraneous preparations, whether antiseptic or of common household variety, which is, strictly speaking, indeed not non-drug. The term “drugless,” as in a naturopathic sense, is a differentiating term denoting that the practitioner uses less drugs in his practice as compared with the practitioners of the regular school of healing. This does not necessarily mean that the naturopathic physician is permitted to run rampant in the regular allopathic physician’s therapeutic field; for he is strictly limited to the use of “Nature’s Agencies, Forces,

Processes and Products.” Nor, does it mean that because the regular allopathic physician has embraced the use of many naturopathic materials and methods—long after naturopaths have proven their therapeutic value—establish a copyright priority to their exclusive use by the regular physician.

Very frequently naturopathic physicians are confused with so-called “Nature Curists.” While naturopathic physicians have a basic philosophy almost identical with the Nature Curist, the latter has a self limited scope or method of therapy. The naturopathic physician is eclectic in his practice embracing the use of all of Nature’s agents, forces, and products.

Another source of error occurs in states which do not have adequate naturopathic legislation. Here the natural healing field is being invaded by members of a non-drug profession. These practitioners, in their desire to broaden their own limited field, often masquerade as naturopaths, and most infrequently to the discredit of naturopathy. I believe, however, such matters lie in the hands of the legislators of such states.

Let not the uninitiated believe that naturopathy is to be classed as regular medicine. In philosophy and therapeutic practice, naturopathy differs greatly from the regular school. Even a comparison of the material contained herein with the approved texts of the regular’s *materia medica* will show a marked difference in the ingredients. The naturopathic physician, while possessing a *materia medica* of his own called the *Naturae Medicina*, does use other effective measures in his practice. The appropriate blending of manipulative, physiotherapeutic and hygienic measures with a carefully chosen botanical or biological prescription constitutes only one method of naturopathic approach to treating the sick.¹³

¹¹ *The Naturopath*. 1902.

¹² *The American Drugless Physician and Mecca News*, Official Organ of the Independent Naturopath Association, Newark, New Jersey, vol. 29, no. 1., October 1948, pg. 5.

¹³ Kuts-Cheraux, Ed. *Naturae Medicina and Naturopathic Dispensatory*, American Naturopathic Physician and Surgeons Association. 2nd ed. 1998. p. 5-6.

Thus, Dr. Kuts-Cheraux here pans both Minimalists and Integrated Medicalists as not being a part of true Naturopathic Medicine. Further regarding the Integrated Medicalist positions that we need to adopt the “medical model” and allopathic techniques, theories, and ideas, Spittler remarks:

Fortunately for Naturopathy the thief (Allopathy) has no philosophy or understanding of the natural laws of cure, hence he is unable properly to apply what he has stolen so as effectively to make use of his ill gotten gains. His patients do not get *completely* well, as is shown — yes, proved — by the vast army of the chronically ill in the world today.¹⁴

This is exactly the problem with Integrated Medical ideas. They are neither allopathic nor naturopathic, but a bastardized collection of techniques from irreconcilable paradigms and philosophies. It is also why Integrated Medicine will never succeed in the public domain.

Consequently, neither position can be true Naturopathy, irrespective of their breast beating. The Minimalists of the Nature Cure bent are not true Naturopaths by their own definitions. True Naturopaths according to Wendel use not only “air, water, light, heat, earth, food and herb therapy, electrotherapy, physiotherapy, minor and official surgery, mechanotherapy, naturopathic corrections and adjustments” but also “all Natural Methods and Modalities”, e.g., every one of them. Minimalists are simply too restrictive in their idea of their scope of practice to be true Naturopaths — and the sheer restrictiveness precludes being a Naturopathic Physician. They do not even teach standard diagnostic and clinical skills such as Dr. Paul Wendel wrote of in his “Handbook On Diagnosis”¹⁵ which he subtitled: “For The Use of Drugless Practitioners And Students.”

¹⁴ Spittler, Harry Rilen, Ed.-in-chief, Basic Naturopathy - A Textbook, American Naturopathic Physician and Surgeons Association. 2nd ed. 1998. p. 23.

¹⁵ Handbook On Diagnosis: For The Use of Drugless Practitioners And Students. Wendel, Paul. 1950.

On the side of the Medical Integrist by their own definitions they are also not happy being Naturopaths, but consider themselves more properly “green allopaths”; which they are. They also emphasize using synthetic drugs as a major treatment modality. Even when they do utilize ‘natural remedies’, being ‘green allopaths’ (their term) their concepts of Integrative Medicine are such that they use herbs as medicines as opposed to foods, they like extracts of herbal alkaloids, inorganic mineral salts, synthetic vitamins, etc. These are heresies to any true Naturopath.

A Medical Doctor in Britain was asked by the news media, “Isn’t it wonderful that allopathic doctors are using more homeopathics?” The Doctor looked at the interviewer for a moment and simply replied, “But how can that be, they are irreconcilable?” This hits the nail on the head. Integrated Medicine is, in the final result, an attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable which requires a veritable smoke and mirrors routine to keep patients from discovering the sleights of hand. Natural Medicine can only be properly practiced within a true Naturopathic mindset.

In this regard we may note the opinion of Dr. Benedict Lust:

There is another specimen of Maverick in human form that I have found on this enlightening trip—I do not know where to classify him unless it is under the head of Modern Medicine. Can you picture a Naturopath who dabbles in surgery and serum treatments? They are as criminal in their work as orthodox Medicine — fooling the public by “Naturopathic” nomenclature. Incidentally, why do some Osteopaths and Chiropractors want surgical privileges? It is a funny world that tries to combine water with oil. These unbranded, uncatalogued, unclassified fake Naturopaths are imbued with the get-rich-quick, damn-the-public ideas. A blot on our decent escutcheon and a disgrace to our civilization.¹⁶

To the credit of most correspondence schools, although some are heading in the direction of Integrated Medicine, they do teach

¹⁶ Nature’s Path, March 1933, “Striding Through the States, p. 82.

somewhat of real natural treatment in healing, though they lack any idea of philosophy, physical examination and clinical internships. To the credit of the Integrated Medicalists they do clinical internships and learn some real diagnostic methods, although their ideas of treatment are deeply polluted into allopathy.

How then do we determine what the scope of practice of the Naturopathic Physician to be? Quite simply. The definition of Naturopathy has existed since 1931 and it has, in fact, been incorporated into the federal Dictionary of Occupational Titles. It is:

**Doctor, Naturopathic (medical services)
079.101-014**

A Naturopathic physician, diagnoses, treats and cares for patients, using a system of practice which bases treatment of physiological functions and abnormal conditions on natural laws governing the human body: utilizes physiological, psychological and mechanical methods, such as air, water, light, heat, earth, phototherapy, food and herb therapy, psychotherapy, electrotherapy, physiotherapy, *minor and official surgery*, mechano-therapy, natural processed foods and herbs and nature's remedies. Excludes major surgery, therapeutic use of x-ray and radium and use of drugs, except those assimilable substances containing elements or compounds which are components of body tissues and are physiologically compatible to body processes for maintenance and life.¹⁷ (bolding mine)

This is the definition that was propounded and accepted by the Naturopathic profession. Ergo, it is this definition which defines and delimits Naturopathic practice. The Naturopathic Physician in the line of Lust, Wendel, Collins, Lindlahr and the other great lights of Naturopathy, practices according to this scope *because he has been trained* as a Naturopathic Physician.

Dr. Lust agrees, having stated definitively:

In closing I will say that Naturopathy — true Naturopathy — is summed up in its recognized definition as embraced in

¹⁷ U.S. Department of Labor, "Dictionary of Occupational Titles"

the special law of Congress of February, 1929. In conformity with this definition are the curriculums of all true Naturopathic schools made. It is the basis for all legislation and our strong line of defense. To the terms of the definition must we adjust our practices. Remember: Naturopaths are Doctors — minus *Materia Medica and Surgery*.¹⁸

This brings us to questions of Naturopathic Education. These questions need to be addressed, but are beyond the scope of this short article. Nevertheless it is evident that, as Dr. Lust noted, Naturopathic education needs to be Naturopathic and neither Minimalist Nature Cure, nor Integrated Medicalist. Naturopathic Medicine is a reality of its own that does not need to be destroyed by either of these two "friends" if it is going to succeed in the marketplace.

However, it can be said quite succinctly that if someone calling himself a "Naturopath" does not recognize this federal scope of practice, then it indicates a failing on the part of that person, school or organization — educational or otherwise.

Simply stated this person is not a proponent of true Naturopathy. This, then, is where the cut is made between true Naturopathy and all pseudo-naturopathies, whether they be of the Minimalist or Integrated Medicalist position. Each of us must determine whether we, ourselves, truly make the cut.

Dr. von Peters is President of First National University of Naturopathy, the oldest and only federally chartered Naturopathic University in the world.

First National University created the Doctor of Naturopathic Medicine (N.M.D.) degree in 1960 to bring the profession back to true Naturopathic Medicine.

**© First National University of Naturopathy
& Allied Sciences
2 Forrest Rd.
Ft. Oglethorpe, GA 30742
706-858-1233**

www.fnun.edu

Revised September, 2001
© All Rights Reserved

¹⁸ ob cit. "Striding Through the States, p. 82.