

*Via email*

18 February 2011

Dear Sirs,

As you have asked for opinions/submissions then I thought I would share some of my thoughts regarding this topic.

I am a final year Naturopathic student who strongly supports the process of registration for Naturopaths and Western Herbalists. I am motivated by discrepancies I see between the standards upheld by both courses and associations and would like these to be addressed by an unbiased body of industry and non-industry experts.

It is my opinion that the term 'Naturopath' should be a protected term only able to be held by a person who has studied a minimum of a 4 year Bachelor degree and has been successfully awarded either a Bachelor of Naturopathy or a Bachelor of Health Science (Naturopathy). Any person with a lesser qualification should not be permitted to use the title Naturopath nor eligible for registration and instead awarded a different title. For those with an Advanced Diploma qualification, perhaps there could be a two year period within which to upgrade to B.Nat or BHSc Nat otherwise they may only use another title and not Naturopath to differentiate their level of qualification. Should they choose to upgrade their qualification, they may be awarded an interim title that reflects they are in the process of becoming a Naturopath.

I also personally think it is preferable if a Naturopath is well educated in at least 3 of the four following modalities: Nutrition, Herbal Medicine, Homoeopathy & Body work e.g. Massage. It seems that in some places only 2 modalities are required to be taught with others apparently offered only as a singly elective. This leads to clients being unsure what it is that a naturopath can actually offer as there is so much variation in what goes into a course. It is also apparent as a student that some courses are 'easier' than others and at present SSNT appears to have the most rigorous training and should perhaps become the standard. I say this with personal experience of studying at three separate Naturopathic schools in both Sydney and Melbourne and being able to compare the educational standards and expectations of each. SSNT educates thoroughly in three modalities and offers Massage as an add-on. I personally feel this should be the minimum standard of education in a naturopathic course and those who do not wish to do so can choose to study either nutrition or herbs separately.

I also think a minimum number of hours in each subject (both the professional modalities plus the medical sciences) should be required for a course to be accredited by the associations/governing body in order to standardise. Again, my personal experience has been that at SSNT I have completed twice the number of hours in some classes than I was expected to in other courses and yet we would both be able to call ourselves a naturopath although the academic requirement was very different. In addition, a degree awarded almost entirely by distance education should not be permitted. There is no substitute for first hand exposure to clinical expertise during lectures. On this note, I also think it should not be permitted for a student to graduate one year and be teaching the next as I have seen in some colleges. A minimum number of several years clinical or further academic experience should be mandatory before you are allowed to lecture in a subject and for the sciences a relevant teaching qualification

would be my ideal as it is important a lecturer can answer questions posed by students!

Upon graduation, mandatory association membership would be my ideal as would registration however, the associations appear to be diverse in what they expect of practitioners and some appear 'softer' than others. It seems that the NHAA has a suitably rigorous standard of accreditation for courses and an expectation of CPE so perhaps they may have input into what the ongoing obligations of practitioners should be and the minimum standard for what an Association should also be. I say this as I am aware of practitioners who join certain associations as they assume they will get cheaper insurance and they are obliged to join at least one association in order to obtain health fund provider numbers, but their choice is also motivated by the understanding that they have few obligations and are rarely policed, therefore do nothing from year to year to upgrade their specific modality knowledge e.g. they never attend seminars. For this reason I already hold certain opinions on who I would prefer to join upon graduation even though it means I shall need to join several associations to cover my various modalities. I personally see this as a preferable and more credible alternative than joining only the one despite the financial saving.

Although mine is the opinion of a student rather than a qualified naturopath in practice, I have worked in an industry support role for many years and hold other relevant qualifications. I take my work and studies very seriously and I look forward to the outcome of these deliberations as I hope wholeheartedly that the registration of us rigorously trained naturopaths happens swiftly in order to raise the professional profile and credibility of our industry to where it deserves.

Yours Sincerely  
Jo Herbert-Doyle