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Commentary

Naturopathy in Ghana: modernity or original state; commentary

Raphael Nyarkotey Obu^{1,*}, Lawrencia Aggrey Bluwey²

¹Nyarkotey University College of Holistic Medicine & Technology, Ghana

²Dept. of Health Administration and Education, University of Education, Winneba, Ghana



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ABSTRACT

Medicine has evolved, and as such, the practice of naturopathy in the past cannot be likened to Naturopathy in this modern era. Due to this, there is a need for standardized structuring in modern Naturopathy, especially in the context of African Naturopathy. Modern Naturopathy is science-based. The Biomedical component of modern Naturopathy cannot be underestimated, as it plays an integral role in the recognition of Naturopathic practitioners and the integration pathway into the Ghanaian healthcare space and Africa's entirety.

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1. Introduction

Medicine has evolved, and as such, the practice of naturopathy in the past cannot be likened to Naturopathy in this modern era. Due to this, there is a need for standardized structuring in modern Naturopathy, especially in the context of African Naturopathy. Modern Naturopathy is science-based. The Biomedical component of modern Naturopathy cannot be underestimated, as it plays an integral role in the recognition of Naturopathic practitioners and the integration pathway into the Ghanaian healthcare space and Africa's entirety. It is newsworthy to find that the more educated a person is, the more likely he/she will take herbal medicine in Ghana.¹ Once educated people are showing interest in Naturopathic remedies, there is the need for practitioners to improve themselves in education to enhance service delivery.

However, this is not the case as no tertiary program in Naturopathy or complementary and Alternative medicine exists in Ghana. With regards to Herbal Medicine, as a result of the passage of the Traditional Medicine Act

2000(Act 575), Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in the Ashanti region of Ghana has been offering the Bachelor of Science in Herbal Medicine for over a decade and remains the only tertiary program in Herbal Medicine. Graduates from the University in Herbal Medicine are integrated into the government Hospitals. Integration is currently being championed in Ghana²⁻⁴ and several developments have been made in government hospitals with herbal departments.⁵

This is not the case for alternative and complementary medicine practices such as Naturopathy, homeopathy, and chiropractic. The problem stems from the fact that these practices are considered foreign traditional medicines, which have been imported into the country. Hence, attention is not being paid to promoting them. This notwithstanding, government in 2010^{6,7} provided recognition and a new bill for promulgation is under consideration.

The new bill defines Naturopathy in Ghana as: “a system of healthcare usually drugless, which uses a wide variety of therapies including hydrotherapy, heat, massage, nutritional supplements, and herbal medicines with the purpose of stimulating optimum functioning of the whole person and

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: collegeofholisticmedicine@gmail.com (R. N. Obu).

supporting the person's own innate healing capacity." This means the practice of naturopathy is a diverse or eclectic⁸ form of primary health care.

In Ghana, modern Naturopathy is gaining huge promotion, and practitioners in training have to contribute to research and infuse modern scientific methods into clinical practice. Naturopathic medicine has also had a National Occupation Standard for training developed at the tertiary level, with two program curricula approved under the Commission for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (CTVET). The two programs are the Higher National Diploma (HND) and Bachelor of Technology (BTech) in Naturopathy and Holistic Medicine for the training of two different cadres of practitioners; Naturopaths and Naturopathic Physicians. It is common knowledge that there cannot be any effective legislation without education. Education aids standardization, thus the need for these curricula.

In other jurisdictions such as South Africa, legislation on naturopathic medicine has worked well and has led to uniform standards of education and practice.⁸ Additionally, regulation in those jurisdictions has improved integration and naturopathic cooperation with all other branches of medical science.⁸ When this happens, there is some level of confidence patients have in receiving naturopathic care from an educated practitioner.⁸

Education and regulation of the naturopathic profession depend on what is practiced in other jurisdictions⁹ though calls have been made for uniform regulation that recognizes naturopathy as a medical system. Also, it has been found that in countries that have regulatory frameworks, one is expected to set high standards and show consistency in the training of such practitioners.⁹

Due to some gaps in naturopathic education,¹⁰ Ghana's version of Naturopathic education is based on competency-based training (CBT) which is believed to more likely close the gaps and improve students' naturopathic medical knowledge, to place Ghana on the global map of modern naturopathy. Modern Naturopathic practice cannot be underestimated. It is not surprising that the Committee of the German Association for Medical Education found that medical education in the field of naturopathy and complementary and integrative medicine has the potential to develop comprehensive core medical competencies.¹¹ As Naturopathy gets recognition and standardization, it is pertinent that we move away from the practice where naturopaths learned their skills via a loose combination of self-education and an apprenticeship-style system.¹²

Although in Ghana, some people are against the academization of Naturopathy and the medical naturopathy curriculum,¹³ it is the way to go to gain recognition and credibility in the healthcare system. These people believe that Naturopathy should be practiced in its original stance and should be devoid of school.

As Ghana prepares to commence its first nationally accredited program being held in the Nyarkotey University College of Holistic Medicine and Technology (NUCHMT), institutions should also concentrate on advocating for a naturopathic lifestyle to be taught in the schools. This means that in this case, if the study of naturopathy starts in the Ghanaian education system, then the right lifestyle, appropriate diets, and prevention from illness would be taught from childhood, and in near future, our country would be healthy and less diseased in the world.¹⁴ We hold the view that modern naturopathy is key to effective standardization in Ghana and it should not be compromised.

2. Source of Funding

None.

3. Conflict of Interest

None.

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Author biography

Raphael Nyarkotey Obu, Professor  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7478-7884>

Lawrencia Aggrey Bluwey, Naturopathy

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