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Brian Isbell
Auomira Parks
Jillian Rowley

School of Integrated Health

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Naturopathy Advances by Degrees

By Brian Isbell, Auromira Parks and Jill Rowley.

Over the past two years a pathway of naturopathy modules has been provided within the Complementary Therapies course of the BSc Scheme of the University of Westminster. This pathway is accredited by the General Council and Register of Naturopaths (GCRN) and draws on the established common core modules of the Scheme that are shared with other courses. The nature and development of the courses have been previously discussed ^{1,2,3}. The content of the naturopathy pathway and the option modules available has also been described in a previous article in the BNJ ⁴. Arising out of the experience of providing the pathway for nearly two years, feedback from the staff, students and the GCRN, the course team decided to seek the validation of a new BSc (Hons) Health Science: Naturopathy course to commence in September 2006. This article outlines the challenges of developing the course and how its design will prepare students for work within an integrated health system.

The Foundation

The complementary therapies Scheme of the School of Integrated Health currently consists of six degrees which are offered in both full time and part time mode, providing flexibility for the students who because of family care or financial reasons may need to change their mode of studies over the time they complete their course. The new Naturopathy course that will join the Scheme will share the

established themes that include health sciences, practitioner development and business skills plus research. Over the past 10 years these themes have evolved through continuous input from the staff, students and the many professional bodies who accredit the degrees of the Scheme

The health sciences theme ensures students have a good understanding of the biomedical model of health and disease from biochemistry, anatomy and physiology to pathology and differential diagnosis. Empowered with this knowledge, students are able to identify when referral to or liaison with other healthcare professionals is necessary as well as being able to communicate effectively with those referring patients to them. The practitioner development scheme builds on their life skills; ensuring students are able to reflect on themselves and their communication skills with patients including the ability to identify how to learn from incidents in their clinical practice. In addition the students complete a module on business skills to prepare them not only for private practice, but also working within the NHS. Their introduction to clinical governance within the NHS, prepares them for working in GP practices and hospitals and provides them with insight into the standards they need to work towards throughout their careers. The research theme not only introduces them to the models of research to explore the efficacy of complementary therapies but also explores how they may use their skills to improve their practice e.g. audit and critiquing papers. The final year research project is a valuable learning experience to help promote research-mindedness in the new generation of

naturopathic practitioners and will also equip them with academic writing skills to further enhance the quantity and availability of quality literature regarding naturopathy in the UK.

As these themes are shared across the Scheme the students learn in mixed groups with those studying other therapies. This provides a rich learning experience where the students not only gain a working knowledge and understanding of other approaches but also develop mutual professional appreciation to prepare them for working within multidisciplinary practices.

Returning to Naturopathic Roots

Introducing a therapeutic approach such as naturopathy to a mature Scheme that already includes therapies such as nutritional therapy, herbal medicine and therapeutic bodywork was a challenge. In addition, the naturopathy course team represent the diversity there is in the naturopathic profession from osteopaths practicing naturopathy to those trained overseas who include homeopathy, herbal medicine, nutritional therapy and therapeutic bodywork in their practice. With the introduction of the new naturopathy degree program, we found ourselves returning to the fundamental principles and practices of naturopathy whilst respecting the boundaries of other therapies such as nutritional therapy and herbal medicine. By returning to naturopathic roots and focusing primarily on traditional nature cure principles and practices such as dietary therapy,

hydrotherapy, healthy lifestyle advice, bodywork, fasting as well as the use of compresses and packs, we created a strong naturopathic program. Bearing in mind the fundamental naturopathic principle of treating the whole person we felt it was important to build a theme throughout the course dedicated to the understanding and treatment of the emotional aspects of illness. The psychotherapeutics theme covers techniques such as counselling, visualisation, meditation, stress management, relaxation, Emotrance and the use of flower essences. A diagnostics techniques module includes conventional methods such as urinalysis along with naturopathic diagnostics such as kinesiology, iridology pulse, tongue and posture analysis. In the two dietary therapy modules the students develop a understanding of the use of diet as a naturopathic therapeutic intervention, the value of functional and superfoods as well as a study of commonly used supplements. With respect to herbal medicine the emphasis is on using herbal teas and a study of commonly used herbal medicines rather than the extensive repertoire used in the herbal medicine course. For homeopathy the emphasis is on the treatment of acute presentations rather than the use of constitutional remedies. The modules of the naturopathy course are outlined in Figure 1. The option modules available in year 3 are listed in Figure 2. If students wish to specialise further in herbal medicine, nutritional therapy or homeopathy, by means of additional part time study, they can complete Graduate Diploma courses available in each therapy.

The Clinical Experience

The multi disciplinary clinic within the University provides another environment in which students learn to work collaboratively identifying the strengths and limitations of their own and other therapeutic approaches. The twelve complementary therapies available within the Polyclinic provide a wealth of opportunities for the students to observe and learn from other approaches. In addition, by working with the naturopathy clinic team who have diverse backgrounds and private practice experience, the students are able to critically evaluate a range of naturopathic therapeutic approaches. The naturopathy clinic has proven to be popular with patients and is planned to triple in size over the next year, to accommodate the increasing demand from patients. A further planned development that is established in many other therapies is the opportunity to observe senior practitioners of the profession treating patients so that the students can learn from good practice. These are video linked sessions that enable cases to be facilitated and discussed with a tutor as they occur without disturbing the patient. In addition to the Polyclinic provision students have the opportunity of observing complementary therapists practising in both the NHS and private practice. Through their experience with different clinics setting students gain insight into different employment opportunities.

The Future

On completion of the new accredited BSc (Hons) Health Sciences: Naturopathy graduates are able to apply to register as naturopaths. The strengthening of the

collaboration with the GCRN will ensure that not only will the undergraduate provision continue to develop to meet the needs of the profession but also through the postgraduate MSc and short courses future continuing professional development opportunities will be available. The rapidly expanding Graduate School in which MPhil and PhD students carry out research is beginning to attract the external funding necessary to provide the evidence base for the efficacy of therapeutic approaches. By developing links with other established providers in education, clinical training and research, both nationally and internationally, the naturopathy provision at the University of Westminster will be able to develop to meet the needs of the patients, practitioners and the profession.

References

1. Isbell B. Complementary therapies courses for the 21st century. *Complementary Therapies in Nursing and Midwifery* 2001;7:90-94.
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3. Isbell B. Clinical training in complementary therapies for the 21st century. *Complementary Therapies in Nursing and Midwifery* 2003;9:83-89.
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Figure 1

Modules of the 3 year Full Time or 5 year Part Time BSc Health Sciences:

Naturopathy course

Year 1

Principles and Practice of Naturopathy (Clinic Module)

Prescribing Therapies (Clinic Module)

Complementary Therapies

Therapeutic Massage (Clinic Module)

Living Anatomy

Biological Chemistry

Physiology

Personal and Professional Development

Year 2

Naturopathic Skills (Clinic Module)

Diagnostic Techniques in Naturopathy

Naturopathic Approaches in Dietary Therapy

Dietetics and Dietary Therapy

Integrated Physiology

Applied Pathophysiology

Methods of Research in Complementary Medicine

Patient-Centred Communication

Year 3

Clinical Practice in Naturopathy (Double, Clinic Module)

Psychotherapeutics in Naturopathy

Holistic Systems

Differential Diagnosis

Research in Practice

Dynamics of Clinical Practice

Figure 2

Option Modules available on the Naturopathy Course

(Modules in the therapies listed below and from the BSc are also available as short courses)

Shiatsu and Qigong Techniques

Environmental Stress

Nutrition in Society

Systems Pathology

Brian Isbell is the Head of the Department of Complementary Therapies within the School of Integrated Health at the University of Westminster. Brian is an osteopath and naturopath, teaches on the naturopathy course and has worked in the Marylebone Health Centre within the NHS and is a clinic tutor in the University's Polyclinic

Auomira Parks is the Course Leader for the new naturopathy course and the senior naturopathy clinic supervisor in the University's Polyclinic. Auomira is a naturopathic doctor with a private practice in Hertfordshire

Jill Rowley is a Senior Lecturer and Deputy Course Leader in Naturopathy. Jill graduated with a first class BSc Honours degree in complementary therapies and runs a busy private practice in Kent.

For additional information about the naturopathic course contact:

The Admissions and Marketing Office

University of Westminster

115 New Cavendish Street

London W1W 6UW

Tel: +44 (0)20 7911 5883

Fax: +44 (0)20 7911 5079

Email: cav-admissions@wmin.ac.uk

www.wmin.ac.uk/sih