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Medical philosophy comprises the underlying premises on which a health care system is based. Once a system is acknowledged, it is subject to debate. In naturopathic medicine, the philosophical debates are a valuable, ongoing process which helps the understanding of health and disease evolve in an orderly and truth revealing fashion.

Randall Bradley, ND
*Philosophy of Naturopathic Medicine Textbook of
Natural Medicine*
Pizzorno, Murray, 1985



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FOUNDATIONS PROJECT INTERNATIONAL EDITORS RETREAT CATAPULTS THE PROFESSION FORWARD: WELCOME ABOARD, BUCKLE UP

BY KATE WILLIAMS, MA

They are philosophers, teachers, scholars, practitioners, scientists, and academic executive officers. They are naturopathic physicians, devoted professional affiliates, all leading-edge thinkers and visionaries. They are the 170 plus writers of the Foundations of Naturopathic Medicine Project's (FNM) textbook. At the project's 2004 inception, the goal was to write a modern, definitive book on naturopathic medical philosophy, principles, and clinical application. Three years into its journey have proven this project much broader in scope and far deeper in impact.

Quickly, the focus shifted from simply writing a needed update of Henry Lindlahr, MD's *Nature Cure: Philosophy and Practice Based On the Unity of Disease and Cure*, published in 1913, to creating a seminal work aimed at codifying the profession's knowledge. To assure accuracy in representation and to prevent another century passing without attending to the profession's theoretical foundations, FNM expanded its vision. In 2006, NCNM, the profession's longest standing college, invited the Foundations Project to establish its academic home there, understanding the urgency and essential timing of this initiative in support of professional formation.

With this academic institutional framework as an operational platform, the need for FNM to be hosting conferences, workshops, and symposia became obvious and necessary extensions of the textbook and its ongoing updated editions.¹

THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL EDITORS RETREAT

After much preparation, coordination, and collaborative writing among international team members spanning several continents, FNM held its first symposia for editors, section leads, agency liaisons, and academic affiliates. In April 2007, participants united at NCNM for a celebratory afternoon, later that evening migrating up the Columbia Gorge to the Skamania Lodge for the First International FNM Editors Retreat. After non-stop presentations, plenary and breakout sessions, questions, meditations, meals, walks, and lively debates, no one expected the startling coherence that emerged in the end.

Representing wide ranging perspectives of naturopathic medical thought

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and practice, from steadfast nature cure purists to integrative, evidence-based researchers, participants considered and debated the meaning of *vis medicatrix naturae*, theories on theories, the development of a metaparadigm for the profession, and how to bring it all into clinical practice, and scientific inquiry. Questioning how these lofty ideas apply to practice and education threaded throughout the dialogue relentlessly. The large conference room crackled, as galleries of early twentieth-century physicians seemed to invisibly fill the empty spaces. The Rationalist school crowded one side of the room while the Empirical school hovered on the other.²

After lively debate in a stimulating attempt to harness the substance behind the healing power of nature, the

vis medicatrix naturae, participants gained momentum and unity in both agreeing, and agreeing to disagree. This was a first step in recognizing that a unifying theory of naturopathic medicine was not going to mean exclusion, but rather inclusively naming unifying boundaries and diverse models that define scope and standards of practice. Instead of deciding whether or not vital force is used by the spirit, the source of

spirit, the same as spirit, or unrelated to spirit, participants unanimously agreed that it exists and informs the practice of naturopathic medicine. That was enough. This discussion was deftly guided by retreat facilitator Valerie Campbell, and Associate Editors for the textbook's spirituality section, Louise Edwards, ND, LAc and the late Emma Bezy, MSW.³

The fires heated once the principles of healing were put on the table. Letitia Watrous, ND and Cathy Rogers, ND presented their paper on nature cure. "Green Allopaths," "Therapeutic Order" and "Insurance Restrictions" were tossed about like hot potatoes. Dr. Watrous stated passionately, "We must keep our full scope [of practice], that we must not give in to our fears about competencies related to acceptance in mainstream healthcare." Several volleys later Joe Pizzorno, ND jumped in the discussion with, "Nature cure needs to be subjected to research to validate it within an evidenced-based model." The range of perspectives within naturopathic medicine played out on the floor, hearts stayed open, senses height-

ened. A school of diverse and unique naturopathic thought, fusing old, new, and emerging philosophies, theories, and principles shimmered in the wings.

Mary Koithan, PhD, RN, professor of Family and Community Medicine at University of Arizona later presented her paper, "The Process of Healing: Constructing and Evaluating Naturopathic Theory." Having gone through this process within the nursing discipline, a field eager to distinguish itself from the general medical profession, Dr. Koithan raised awareness of naturopathic medicine's position relative to its emergence as a professionally recognized discipline.

As she presented levels of theory from metaparadigm (an agreed on essential and overarching philosophy and cosmology describing a discipline, in a few simple phrases) to principles of practice, spoken and unspoken questions rose through spreading excitement about clearly distinguishing naturopathic medicine from other health care disciplines. For example, does practice create theory, or is theory required to determine practice? How will naturopathic medicine mature as a discipline within traditional academic and professional standards without conforming to frameworks that limit its empirical nature of practice? How can theories really be useful in clinical practice?

Koithan's message was clear, if you want to grow as a discipline and become a profession influential in positively addressing a growing crisis in healthcare, you must create a "cogent voice of the discipline." "That means," she expressed, "examining the profession's "sets of theories, disciplinary principles and key pieces of literature for [your] internal consistency as well as [your] external applicability and generalizability."

Lights turned on. Rationalist and Empirical observers in the gallery, spectators of medicine's past, let out a collective sigh, released from an historic burden. Participants discussed how unifying theories, including a core metaparadigm sustaining principles of practice, could create a welcome foundation without jeopardizing the creativity inherent in the individualized approaches to practicing naturopathic medicine. Joe Holcomb, ND, Naturopathic Society International, commented on this key element, "Naturopathic physicians have long struggled with their identity—a profession of rugged individualists. Establishing and incorporating a metaparadigm will allow the profession to come together like never before."

By the fourth day, and hours into discussing proposed clinical applications, critical advances in correlating naturopathic philosophy and theory with practice were achieved inspiring a call to restructure the textbook's clinical applications section. Ideas were popping around the room. Proposed models sparked excitement and resonance. In the end participants had collective breakthroughs reaching elements of a coherent definition of the vis medicatrix naturae, and drafting core concepts of a naturopathic metaparadigm. With nearly a hundred years of fierce independence and struggle to survive as a medical discipline behind them, the multi-generational clan present at the end of the day felt the peace and coherence that emerge with personal and professional maturity in the classic

process of professional formation.

A collective vision for a contemporary foundation of naturopathic medicine was experienced because independent minds united with a shared heart. The FNM team is forging the way to making naturopathic medicine a coherent and complete system of



Participants on the steps of Skamania Lodge after the Closing Plenary; Foundations Project First International Editors Retreat. April 5, 2007

medical theory and practice ready to meet the needs of physicians, patients, colleges and their students.

Acknowledgments abounded as participants expressed their awe in the retreat's outcomes. Don Warren, ND shared, "It was a peak experience . . . in an atmosphere of expectation, respectfulness, love of our profession and a great desire to contribute in a thoughtful, reflective manner to the evolution of naturopathic medicine." Holding the talking stick, Mitchell Stargrove, ND, LAc, history editor, offered, "I am impressed by our ability to look at what we are doing and aspire to articulate it." Finally, senior editor, James Sensenig, ND, having participated in other significant naturopathic gatherings over the years, proposed that the retreat "be forever thought of as the Skamania Breakthrough Convocation."

CATAPULTING THE PROFESSION FORWARD: MOMENTUM BUILDS

Textbook Timeline to Publication

Inspired by the retreat's momentum, the FNM team has been progressing and expanding on several fronts. The textbook production timeline is on schedule. The manuscript will be delivered to Elsevier, the publisher, on April 24, 2009 and the book is expected to be available by that year's end. Concurrently, senior textbook editors will draft a chapter on the metaparadigm discussed at the retreat. This will be co-authored by all retreat participants, distributed for review later this year. The goal is to publish the work in a professional journal.

Metaparadigm, Ongoing Dialogues

"The Gathering," an annual student-led philosophy conference is considering as its core topic for the year a special dialogue on the metaparadigm theory, which may continue at their various events. The goal is to engage the larger naturopathic community in concept development and theory synthesis. The events will encourage participation from students, faculty, practicing physicians, and other interested community members. The discussion is invited to

continue within the Gathering forum through to the next FNM symposium, "The International Clinical Integration Symposium," scheduled for spring 2010, following the textbook's publication.

The International Clinical Integration Symposium 2010

In retreat discussion, the FNM team was acutely aware that venues for further discussion must be organized within the larger community. Integrating philosophy and theory into clinical practice in a concrete, effective, and meaningful manner is paramount. A symposium, aimed at exploring these ideas, will occur shortly after the textbook's publication. The textbook will

serve as a starting point for further discussion and evolution of naturopathic clinical theory, the outcomes of which will be folded into the textbook's second edition.

FNM will host this event while inviting agency liaisons—the Gathering, Naturopathic Societies, CNME, CAND, AANMC-CCACO, AANP, NPLEX, NSI, and NMSA—to

co-chair the symposium. The goal is to encourage more input and planning into shaping the symposium's agenda, policies and procedures, maximizing the event's effectiveness. While the FNM team numbers more than 170 members, its goal is to engage all interested members of the naturopathic medicine community.

NCNM HOLDS A VISION FOR THE PROJECT'S SUSTAINABILITY

To contain and support the growing Foundations Project mission, NCNM is considering options for expanding the college's involvement. Dr. Schleich, president of NCNM, views the FNM project as critical to anchoring the profession of naturopathic medicine in an unassailable location within society. Naturopathic medicine, he says is moving unrelentingly toward an orthodox position in the delivery of primary care in America.

There are red flags along this path, principally the critical need to keep traditions alive by committing to constant research, high quality clinical education, and wide publication. Dr. Schleich writes, "Professional formation is complex, unforgiving, and unavoidable when the primary elements align. These

The FNM team is forging the way to making naturopathic medicine a coherent and complete system of medical theory and practice ready to meet the needs of physicians, patients, colleges and their students.

include a substantial higher education platform for well-designed training and education that discourages cherry-picking of other groups and medical systems; significant increase in licensed practitioners who are sustainably successful; and the consequent ongoing codification of theoretical and clinical understanding and application."

President Schleich would like to use the college's strengths as an institution to fortify FNM's vision and mission, which is to codify the foundations and advance the future of naturopathic medicine by establishing and coordinating a cooperative "international network of scholars, thought leaders, scientists, colleges, and agencies that engage in collegial dialogue aimed at developing a coherent, modern interpretation of the foundations of naturopathic medicine."

NCNM, the profession's oldest 501(c)(3) and academic institution, could enhance the means for safeguarding FNM's work and products by making the project's essential fundraising dimension more sustainable. As a "natural convergence point for bringing maturity to the profession," according to Dr. Schleich, FNM's growth and development are timely and reflect the profession's readiness to institutionalize and serve as a guide for the future of healthcare. There is much work to do, and if the momentum generated at the Skamania Lodge Editors' Retreat is an indicator, the work will be done well and be fruitful as it unfolds.

If you want to learn more about how you can support or be involved in the Foundations of Naturopathic Medicine's growing number of projects, contact:

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You can visit their websites at
www.foundationsproject.com
www.ncnm.edu.

¹Originally launched and fostered as a special project by the Institute for Natural Medicine (INM), the project moved to a long-term academic home at National College of Natural Medicine (NCNM) in 2006.

²For more information about the distinctions between the Rationalist and Empirical school see *Divided Legacy*, Harris L. Coulter, PhD. Washington, DC: Webawken Book Company, 1975. Volumes 1-3.

³Emma Bezy became suddenly ill and died soon after the retreat—a heart wrenching loss for family, friends and the project. She will be deeply missed. Devoted to the textbook project, and a scholar of diverse world religions, she submitted an outstanding chapter—including, among other writings to be published in the textbook, an original work, "Roots of Naturopathic Philosophy in World Traditions and Religions."

Kate Williams, MA is a freelance writer and owner of WordTurners, writing, editing, and coaching for healthcare providers, non-profits, entrepreneurs, and fellow writers. She lives in Portland, Oregon and has been involved in the Naturopathic Medicine community for 20 years.
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