

National's Bold New Venture in Integrative Medicine

Editorial Staff

Founded in 1906, National University of Health Sciences (NUHS) has been a standard bearer in chiropractic education for 100 years. Now in its centennial year, NUHS is making a bold move that could redefine complementary and alternative medicine education, and send ripples of change in how consumers and mainstream health care providers perceive CAM professions.

While taking great pride in its chiropractic roots, National envisions transforming its campus into a new hub of alternative medical practice and knowledge. In addition to its current programs in massage therapy and chiropractic medicine, the university is simultaneously opening master's degree programs in Oriental medicine and acupuncture in the fall of 2006, along with a new doctor of naturopathic medicine program.

"We will be one of only two campuses in the country to combine chiropractic, Oriental and naturopathic medicine on one campus," said NUHS President James Winterstein, DC. "What will be unique at National is that students in our CAM programs will participate in integrated learning opportunities in a dynamic way that may very well change the face of alternative medicine as we know it."

"In the marketplace, these professions often compete with each other," explained Dr. Winterstein. "We, on the contrary, are excited about the new dialogue, collaborative research and integrative clinical care opportunities we'll create by bringing these three fields together in one university."

A History of Moving Alternative Medicine Forward

NUHS has long been an advocate for and a pioneer in integrative medicine. Its founder, John Fitz Alan Howard, DC, MD, relocated the institution from Davenport, Iowa, to Chicago in order to grant its students access to hospital facilities and scientific culture. From its earliest days, National has shunned the limitations of professional separatism, instead embracing the scientific method, evidence-based care, and broad-scope training in modern medical diagnosis and procedures for its chiropractic curriculum.

NUHS has a century of "firsts" to its credit. It was the first chiropractic institution to publish a medically indexed research journal; the first to require a bachelor's degree for admission to its doctor of chiropractic program; the first to provide full human dissection in an on-campus gross anatomy laboratory; the first in seeking accreditation and/or approvals of the institution and its various programs by state, regional and federal accrediting bodies or agencies; and now, the first to integrate the core curricula of several CAM professional programs in one university.

National's aim is to prepare its students to enter the world of mainstream medicine, rather than relegate them to the fringes of "alternative" health care. "Whenever the media speaks about natural health care professions, it often refers to them as 'alternative,' 'complementary' or 'adjunct,' said Dr. Winterstein. "Whatever qualifier is used, natural health care physicians are often cast as merely supportive players or second tier when compared to conventional allopathic medical

doctors. We're out to change that. We want to make chiropractic and naturopathic physicians the patient's first-choice, primary care option. We want our massage, acupuncture and Oriental medical professionals to be full players in mainstream health care venues."

Always staunch defenders of the chiropractic physician's place in primary care, National, Dr. Winterstein and NUHS grads have made important inroads into traditional medical enclaves, and while chiropractic continues as a pre-eminent degree program, National continues to forge bridges between allopathic and chiropractic institutions. Two of its student interns currently serve in clinical rotations at Philadelphia's Graduate Hospital, and one serves at Bethesda Naval Base Hospital. The first DC to practice at a Veterans Administration hospital was National graduate Dr. Tim Dennis. Other National graduates have established themselves as leaders in their profession and ambassadors to both the allopathic and scientific communities.

The university recently received two major research grants from the National Institutes of Health, and has promulgated important findings in spinal anatomy and clinical chiropractic care. Dr. Winterstein himself recently co-authored research showing that chiropractic physicians can provide high-quality care at greater cost savings in a managed care environment in comparison to traditional allopathic care.

With rigorous science education and broad-scope clinical training, National breaks the stereotypes of "alternative medicine." "We believe in evidence-based medicine. Stated institutional policy has for the past two decades required our treatment modalities to be grounded in science. We reject questionable therapies with no research or scientific basis to their claims," observed Dr. Winterstein. "We will continue this scrutiny over therapies taught in our new programs as well."

National proved it could bring the same basic science focus and medical training perspective to other programs when it launched a successful massage therapy certification program in 1999. NUHS is one of only a few massage schools in the country to incorporate human dissection in its anatomy program for massage students, and to stress the terminology, documentation and therapeutic skills necessary for its massage graduates to function at the peak of professionalism in a medical environment. "Our massage graduates aren't limited to working only at spas and fitness centers," said Dr. Winterstein. "Their health science training puts them at the top of the list for jobs at hospitals, rehabilitation facilities, doctors' offices and nursing homes."

Dr. Winterstein pledges this same uncompromising commitment to preparing naturopathic and Oriental medicine graduates to be ready to take leading roles in mainstream health care. "By building a campus where we integrate drug-free, natural medical specialties, we can move beyond 'turf-based' care and arguing among each other. When we move in a unified direction, we can make more serious inroads into mainstream care."

Challenges in the Near Future

Establishing its integrated campus poses challenges for National, especially in offering an ND degree. "We will be the only accredited naturopathic medicine program in the Midwest," explained Winterstein. "However, we are in the position of opening an ND program in Illinois, a state which does not currently license NDs and where NDs are not allowed to practice the full scope of their medicine." This means that for several months of a National ND student's clinical internship, he or she will have to travel off-campus to train in affiliate clinics in one of the 14 states that currently license NDs.

As of press time, a bill establishing licensure for NDs in Illinois is under consideration by state lawmakers in Springfield. Yet in the media, the proposal has received predictable opposition from

the powerful Illinois State Medical Society. National hopes that opening its new ND program, in addition to an increasing consumer demand for natural health care, will hasten licensure for naturopathic physicians in Illinois.

Ironically, Chicago was once a major hub for naturopathic medicine. One of its most famous practitioners, Dr. Henry Lindlahr, had a medical center and health spa with locations in Chicago and suburban Elmhurst, which borders National's hometown of Lombard. What many do not know is that until 1952, National offered a naturopathic medicine program.

A second challenge is the overlap in treatment modalities between professions. For example, naturopaths perform spinal and soft-tissue manipulations, which are traditionally the specialty of chiropractic physicians. Both chiropractic and naturopathic medicine incorporate acupuncture in their scope of practice (depending on individual state stipulations), often to the consternation of acupuncture and Oriental medical professionals.

"We are in the process of rerouting what used to be major sources of conflict between the three professions into positive opportunities for integration, understanding and respect. It does no harm to continue training naturopathic and chiropractic students in acupuncture, but our students will see and understand the increased depth of study our Oriental medical and acupuncture students engage in, and will have greater inclination to rely on their expertise when conferring about patient needs, and refer patient cases to them without reservation," Winterstein explained.

National's Vision

The ultimate goal of adding other CAM professional degrees was part of the impetus behind the institution's changing its name from National College of Chiropractic to National University of Health Sciences and taking on a university structure in the year 2000.

In the 1990s, Dr. Winterstein was inspired by the writings of J. Warren Salmon, PhD, of the University of Illinois at Chicago, as well as the writing of Ron Caplan, PhD, from Rutgers University. The writings highlighted trends in alternative health care and the need for bringing CAM professions together under one umbrella. Caplan posited that chiropractic was uniquely positioned to initiate the integration and unification of CAM professions to their mutual benefit. Dr. Winterstein enthusiastically distributed these writings to the NUHS board as well as to presidents of other chiropractic colleges. Few shared Dr. Caplan's vision at the time, but many are now waking up to the potential gains of integrating the branches of CAM in both educational and clinical service settings.

While established CAM providers may scoff at National's move or feel threatened by integration with their competitors, prospective students and patients may instead see promise and potential. That is National's hope. Today's health care consumer is reeling from high costs, impersonal care, and frightening headlines about prescription drug side-effects and costs. National's vision of collaborative medicine, and its new breed of alternative primary care physicians, could prove both compelling and economically competitive. Such vision may indeed breathe fresh air and hope into a weary health care market looking for more conservative and preventive options to surgery and drugs.

"Everyone knows that consumer demand for natural health care is growing," said Dr. Winterstein. "But that doesn't diminish a patient's need to have confidence in their doctor's medical training and skill. National produces doctors who do not compromise medical science for the sake of alternative health care, and offer their patients a great 'first choice' as their primary provider. In addition, our National grads will be fluent in the language and practices of all major branches of health care,

and know how and when to call on professionals from every discipline."

"When you come to National's campus or its patient care clinics, you'll have the best of every branch of natural medicine under one roof," he added. "It will be a model for a new world of health care, one built on science, choice, professionalism and evidence-based care. In another hundred years, at our bicentennial celebration, many may well look back on National's current decision as a defining point in the history of alternative health care."

To learn more about National University of Health Sciences and its chiropractic, naturopathic medicine, massage, and acupuncture and Oriental medicine programs, visit www.nuhs.edu.

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