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Introducing Naturopathic Doctors to Indian Health Service Clinics

For the first time in history, naturopathic medicine is now accepted by the Indian Health Service (IHS) as part of their repayment program for qualified student loans.

This means that in the future the doctors you see at your IHS clinic may include a Naturopathic Doctor. Naturopathic medicine is a medical discipline that uses the inherent powers of healing that exist in all people, and in all of nature, to restore health.

Naturopaths look for the underlying causes of disease to facilitate recovery rather than eliminate or suppress symptoms, which can be the body's attempt to defend, adapt, recover or heal itself, or the result of the disease, according to the American Association of Naturopathic Physicians.

The Department of Health and Human Services and the IHS decision to allow repayment of student loans for Naturopathic Doctors is owed in part to efforts by the American Association of Naturopathic Physicians to add Naturopathic Doctors to the IHS list of "priority health professionals."

According to the updated IHS rules, Naturopaths can earn up to \$20,000 a year toward repayment of their student loans in exchange for their commitment to two years' employment obligation practicing at an Indian Health program full-time, for which they are paid.

It was a triumph for the inclusion of naturopathic medicine in the Native community when last year the American Association of Naturopathic Physicians re-engaged in discussions with the IHS and the Department of Health and Human Services, as their previous requests for approval met with denial. The approval came on January 23, 2013.

Due to the determination and relentless effort by the licensed graduates of accredited naturopathic medical schools, they are now eligible for all federal loan repayment programs.

Naturopathic medicine is currently on the bottom of the IHS list, but the goal of the American Association of Naturopathic Physicians and the Association of Accredited Naturopathic Medicine Colleges is to spread the word concerning the benefits naturopathic medicine can have on American Indians and Alaska Natives.

"Native Americans and Alaska Natives share naturopathic physicians' belief in holistic approaches to health," said Mandisa Jones, spokesperson for the American Association of Naturopathic Physicians. "Placing naturopathic physicians on reservations would be a match

made in holistic heaven.”

"One of the great things about naturopathic medicine is that we have so many tools," said Dr. Orna Izakson, a Portland, Ore., ND. Naturopaths use nutritional medicine, botanical medicine, naturopathic physical medicine including naturopathic manipulative therapy, public health measures and hygiene, counseling, minor surgery, homeopathy, acupuncture, prescription medication, intravenous and injection therapy, naturopathic obstetrics (natural childbirth), and appropriate methods of laboratory and clinical diagnosis.

"I have helped people in all kinds of situations—from people who are on the highest doses of dozens of medications to others where mainstream diagnostics just can't find anything wrong," Dr. Izakson said. "If someone's been trying a course of treatment that's only sort of been working, I've almost always got a different way to approach things and get results."

In order for Naturopathic Doctors to continue on the list of health professionals approved for the loan repayment program the tribes themselves need to advocate that naturopathic medicine is beneficial.

"While I have been to my local Indian Health clinic it is my preference to see my ND at another clinic," says Elizabeth Woody (Navajo/Warm Springs/Wasco/Yakama).

Woody's Naturopathic Doctor alerted her to her food allergies and vitamin deficiencies. He provided her with the nutritional information and practices that enabled her to lose 70 pounds without stress. She reduced all her allopathic medications from seven to two for Type Two Diabetes.

"I was able to eliminate the medications that had side effects of weight gain, heart attack and stroke potential, and dizziness." They also, said Woody, caused her to fall down several times with resulting injuries. "I had to see an orthopedic specialist, and physical therapy to cope with and heal from the injuries to my knee, foot, and shoulder.

"It has saved me hundreds of dollars in co-pay fees. My health has improved. My mental clarity. I believe the Naturopathic Doctor, who looks at the whole picture, has saved me further damage from dangerous medications, and further injury."

The future goal of the American Association of Naturopathic Physicians and the Association of Accredited Naturopathic Medicine Colleges is to work with licensed graduates and tribes to create beneficial partnerships that will lead to the better overall health of tribal communities.

"Surveys of naturopathic physicians have time and time again documented their desire to work in rural and underserved areas," said Jones. "The IHS program can play an important role in bringing knowledgeable physicians to the reservations to treat the many chronic diseases that are amenable to care from naturopathic physicians."

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