Including Naturopathic Physicians in Medicare
A Proposal to Modernize Medicare

Why Should Naturopathic Physician Be Included in Medicare?

Medicare is the primary source of health insurance for the nation’s seniors. Yet Medicare has failed to keep up with the scientific and legal advances that have brought naturopathic medicine into the health care mainstream. By modernizing the Medicare program to permit naturopathic physicians (NDs) to serve as participating physicians, Congress can give Medicare beneficiaries access to the kind of holistic, whole person, cost-effective care that so many older Americans desire.

There are many reasons to include naturopathic physicians as participating physicians in Medicare:

- Naturopathic medicine is a highly cost-effective form of health care that can help bend the rising cost curve in Medicare.
- Naturopathic physicians are trained as primary care physicians and can help alleviate the looming shortage of primary care physicians, estimated to reach 45,000 over the next decade.
- Seventy-five percent of older Americans prefer that their doctor first use natural therapies, such as improved diet or supplements, before prescribing drugs or surgery. In addition, while 55% of seniors would consider seeing a naturopathic physician, only 23% are willing to do so if they have to pay for the entire cost of their care out of pocket.¹ In other words, millions of people pay Medicare taxes all their working lives, but when they become eligible for Medicare, the kind of health care they want isn’t accessible.
- Including NDs in Medicare will rectify a major inconsistency in federal law that may cause potentially harmful disruptions in care. Under federal law, commercial insurers may not discriminate against licensed health care providers, including naturopathic physicians, with respect to participation in health insurance. Yet, upon entering Medicare, patients of NDs will lose access to their physician unless they are willing to pay the entire cost of care out-of-pocket.

The Medicare program remains antiquated in its approach to health care. Medicare currently limits participating physicians to medical doctors (MDs), doctors of osteopathy (DOs), dentists, podiatrists, optometrists, and chiropractors, but does not cover patients’ visits to naturopathic physicians.

Medicare Naturopathic Physician Access Act

AANP seeks to have the “Medicare Naturopathic Physician Access Act” Introduced in Congress. The bill would modernize Medicare by:

- Amending Title XVIII of the Social Security Act to enable licensed naturopathic doctors to furnish naturopathic medicine services under Medicare.
- Designating naturopathic physicians as primary care practitioners under Medicare’s “Primary Care Incentive Program.”

NDs’ participation in insurance can help transform the nation’s health system by increasing the health system’s emphasis on patient-centered, whole person care.

¹ Infosurv. Older Americans’ Views on Naturopathic Physicians in Medicare. April 2014.