Naturopathic Medicine: Cost Saving Disease Prevention and Health Improvement

Naturopathic Medicine Works

Improved Medical Outcomes
- Several clinical trials have demonstrated how naturopathic care produces health improvement and risk factor reduction:
  - **Menopausal symptoms**: patients smoked less and exercised more. These patients were *seven times* more likely to report improvement in insomnia and increased energy.\(^1\)
  - **Anxiety**: improvements in anxiety, fatigue, and quality-of-life.\(^2\)
  - **Low Back Pain**: less pain, more weight loss, less days off work.\(^3\)
  - **Heart Disease**: fewer medications, better blood pressure and cholesterol, better mood.\(^4\)
  - **Diabetes**: improvements in blood sugar, mood, and self-care.\(^5\)
  - **Multiple Cardiovascular risk factors**: reduction in Hypertension, High Cholesterol, Obesity, Smoking, Inactivity and Excessive Stress.\(^6\)

Improved Community Health Outcomes
- Patients receiving CAM services were significantly more likely to have obtained commonly used preventive services, including blood pressure and cholesterol testing, complete physical exams, and breast cancer screening.\(^7\)

Improved Patient Satisfaction
- Patient satisfaction with services: 92% CAM vs. 44% conventional services.\(^8\)
  - Bastyr Center for Natural Health – the teaching clinic of the naturopathic medical school in Seattle – ranked in the top 3 among 46 Seattle-area primary care clinics for overall patient satisfaction.\(^9\)

Naturopathic Medicine Saves Money

Naturopathic Care Reduces need for more-costly Conventional Medical care
- 55% of CAM users report a slight to substantial reduction of their use of conventional medical care.\(^8\)
- 61% of CAM users report a slight to substantial reduction in their use of prescription drugs.\(^8\)
- The Diabetes Prevention Trial demonstrated that diet and lifestyle treatments to prevent type 2 diabetes were more effective (and cost effective) than early drug therapy in high-risk patients.\(^10\)
- Williamson et al. recently recommended increased incorporation of diet and lifestyle therapy into the health system in their review of health policy for diabetes prevention.\(^11\)
- Blue Shield’s internal study found that a naturopathic-centered managed care program could cut the costs of chronic and stress related illness by up to 40%, and lower costs of specialist utilization by 30%.\(^12\)
- Naturopathic care to treat diabetics led to improvements in blood sugar, mood, and patient self care.\(^5\)

Naturopathic Care Reduces Employee Sick Days and Cost, while Improving Productivity
- Employees of the Canadian Postal Service receiving naturopathic care for low back pain or heart disease showed reductions in lost work days and improvements in productivity while at work.\(^5,13\)
- These improvements in workplace productivity actually made naturopathic medicine a *COST-SAVINGS* approach. In other words, adding naturopathic care for employees showed an actual return-on-investment.
- Vermont Auto Dealers Association use of naturopathic care for employees saved $2.10 in medical costs for every dollar spent, and $8.20 in total costs per employee for every dollar spent.\(^6\)

Naturopathic Medicine is not an “add-on,” but Primary Care
- 67.7% patients in Washington State who receive Naturopathic care do not receive concurrent care from an MD/DO for their RFV (reason for visit). In most cases Naturopathic care is not “add-on” care.\(^14\)
Naturopathic care has negligible cost

- A 2004 analysis of payers found that in WA State CAM services cost approximately $0.20-$0.19 per member per month in HMO and PPO plans respectively.\(^\text{15}\)
- A 2006 analysis attempting to quantify the impact of the WA State “Every Category of Provider” law found that the impact on insurance premiums was “modest,” representing about 2.9% of total expenditures.\(^\text{16}\)
- According to Lafferty et al. in 2004, approximately 7.6% of cancer patient records sampled had claims for naturopathic services amounting to <2% of overall medical bills for cancer care for over 7,000 patients. The average amount billed per cancer patient for Naturopathic services was $413.00; the average amount billed for conventional care for the same patients was $40,728.\(^\text{17}\)

References: