



Including Naturopathic Physicians in Medicare Preventing Harmful Drug Interactions



Naturopathic physicians are trained extensively in pharmacology, including drug-to-drug and drug-to-herbs interactions. Their training includes managing patients' medications and coordinating prescription medications with herb/nutritional supplementation.

Polypharmacy is an area of concern for elderly patients. Approximately 13% of the population-at-large are over the age of 65, yet they account for 30% of all prescriptions written. Alarming, most older Americans take an average of three to five medications.¹ They are also more likely to suffer from an adverse drug event due to inappropriate or ineffective prescribing. In a study of more than 150,000 elderly patients, 29% had received at least one of 33 potentially inappropriate drugs.² The estimated rate of harmful drug interactions is 6% for patients with two medications to as high as 50% if patients are taking five or more medications.³

In addition, researchers have increasingly reported on cases of excessive or inappropriate use of herbal dietary supplements. Some have called this problem 'polyherbacy'. Naturopathic physicians are skilled in protecting against polyherbacy.

¹ Williams, CM. Using medications appropriately in older adults. *Am Fam Physician*. 2002;66(10): 1917-1924.

² Simon SR, Chan KA, Soumerai SB. Potentially inappropriate medication use by elderly persons in U.S. health maintenance organizations, 2000-2001. *J Am Geriatr Soc*. 2005;53(2):227-232.

³ Lin P. Drug interactions: a method to the madness. 2004. *Perspectives in Cardiology*. 2004; 20(10):20-24.