

THE SOUTH SHALL RISE AGAIN—A NATURAL MEDICINE REVIVAL IN NORTH CAROLINA

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A little more than four years ago, a handful of naturopathic physicians came before the North Carolina legislature in hopes of bringing licensure for naturopathic doctors to this state. Few in number and without much financial support, they were unsuccessful in their attempts to obtain licensure. But they did succeed in making their voices heard in the medical community. Faint at first, those voices have grown and joined the new trend in health care that is being felt throughout this country.

That shift was first made clear to the medical establishment with David Eisenberg's study revealing how much money Americans were spending out of pocket for alternative and complementary health care (1). It is becoming more apparent that this is not just the latest health fad. In fact, many medical schools are now beginning to teach courses introducing alternative therapies to their students (*Ed: See related news story by Mary Jo Kreitzer.*)

One such course has now been taught at the University of North Carolina Medical School (UNC) at Chapel Hill for the past two years. Organized as an evening elective for medical students, nutritionists, pharmacy students and nurses, the class was first limited to 30 students. Back by popular demand this year, it has grown to 60 students with a waiting list. Taught in one semester, it is a survey course, examining homeopathy, acupuncture, herbs, spiritual healing and more. The nutrition lecture is taught by a naturopath (*the author*). Many students have commented that this class leaves them "ready to learn more" and plans are in the works to expand this program.

Across the street at the school of pharmacy, June McDermott, PhD received approval this spring to teach third and fourth year pharmacy students about various herbs and homeopathic remedies available in drug stores. The hope is that this class will produce a pharmaceutical guide for pharmacists to use in the field.

Not to be outdone by UNC, nearby Duke Medical Center treats cardiovascular disease, diabetes and hypertension using a vegetarian diet, meditation and yoga. In addition, Duke Medical Center runs one and two week retreats called "Healing the Heart" for people from all over the country; the emphasis is as much on spiritual healing as it is physical. Duke also held a national conference in October 1996 entitled "Integrating the Mind, Body, and Spirit in Medical Practice." More than 400 people attended, with a waiting list.

Other evidence that natural medicine is thriving in North Carolina includes: midwives using homeopathic remedies and Gary Bickers, MD, from Winston-Salem, who organizes all day Saturday sessions so practitioners may share their clinical experiences using herbs and natural supplements. Finally, UNC Medical School has approved an internship program for fourth year students to spend one month with an alternative medical practitioner.

- 1. Eisenberg DM et al. Unconventional medicine in the United States—prevalence, costs, and patterns of use. *N Engl J Med* 1993;328:246-52.

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