

Special Feature:

ND insights on the Ontario Therapeutics and Prescribing Exam

More than 540 Ontario naturopaths have successfully completed the voluntary Prescribing and Therapeutics Exam offered by the College. This post-registration exam is essential for naturopaths who want to meet the Standard of Practice for Prescribing, which allows them to safely prescribe and understand drugs and substances prescribed by other health care practitioners. For naturopaths, this includes the specific drugs and substances outlined in the General Regulation of the Naturopathy Act, 2007, such as therapeutic doses of vitamins A and D, folic acid and more. Successful completion of the course and exam is also one of the pre-requisites for naturopaths wanting to offer Intravenous Infusion Therapy (IVIT).

We recently conducted a series of confidential, one-on-one telephone interviews with Members to learn more about their perceptions of the exam and whether they have plans to take it in the future. Participants shared their impressions of the exam, including comments about cost, relevance, the amount of study and prep time, and the likelihood of passing the exam.

To shed light on some of these topics, we reached out to three naturopaths who have passed the exam. They work in different practice settings with varying years in practice. We asked them to share their thoughts about

how the exam helps them in practice and benefits their patients. We also asked them what they liked – and found most challenging – about the process.

We realize not everyone has an interest in taking the exam or meeting the Standard of Practice and that a variety of factors influence their choice; however, the Council of the College asks that every Member of the profession give consideration to taking the exam for the benefit of the public and the profession. For those who are considering or preparing for the exam, page 21 also features an article with 5 tips on preparing for the exam.





ND insights on the Ontario Therapeutics and Prescribing Exam

How has taking the course and exam helped you in practice?

Dr. Holly Fennell, ND: I am able to confidently prescribe vitamins, desiccated thyroid and bioidentical hormones where appropriate. I reference my exam notes frequently and now in each patient chart add a few key points about the drugs my patients are on. This allows me to not only better understand my patients but to ensure I am using the material I learned. I spent a lot of time preparing for the exam and it is important to me that I use the material in a practical way every day to better my skills.

Dr. Rick Olazabal, ND: It helps me to assess medical information in an unbiased manner, whether it's natural or not. We need to be critical of both sides in order to provide patients with effective, quality care. Studying for the exam allowed me to speak to patients about their treatments with more confidence in terms of benefits, interactions, testing, and more.

What motivated you to take the exam?

Holly: Initially I was motivated only because IVIT is a big part of my practice and the notion of not being able to not provide it was terrifying! As I began to study and prepare for the exam this quickly changed. I realized it was helping me better understand Naturopathic Medicine by giving me deeper knowledge and understanding of my patients as a result of understanding the drugs they are prescribed.

Rick: I felt that in order to provide patients with the level of care I wanted to, it was important to access as much of our scope as possible. It became a matter of safety and effectiveness. While it has been frustrating for patients because we don't have access to many scheduled natural substances and/or hormones, taking the exam was the first step as we hope more substances will be eventually added to our schedules in the future.

Dr. Patricia Rennie, ND: The only reason for me to have this ability in my practice is to prescribe vitamin D above 1,000 IU and vitamin A above 10,000 IU. Though it seemed like a big price to pay for so little benefit, it put me on par with younger colleagues and I do think it is important that the government see that we have all met a standard of practice like this when we ask them to consider expanding our scope in this area.

What have you found to be the greatest benefit?

Holly: I am much more confident when talking to MDs and other members of my patients' medical team. I am also more confident in understanding contraindications. I now commonly call patients' pharmacists and use them as a resource for questions. Before the exam this was not something I did.

Rick: The greatest benefit is really the end result: access to slightly wider scope. When patients learn that NDs can prescribe certain scheduled substances they feel more secure



ND insights on the Ontario Therapeutics and Prescribing Exam

and their trust increases. This is a good thing because patients can benefit tremendously from having a health care provider who can spend more time educating them on their medications, their health, and their other options (i.e., part of proper informed consent).

What did you like – and find most challenging – about the exam?

Holly: I liked being able to study on my own time, however this was also my biggest challenge as a mother and a busy clinician. I found the enormity of the material a challenge but felt a huge sense of accomplishment when I passed the exam. I enjoyed listening to the podcasts while driving.

Rick: The exam is challenging. It has to be in order to ensure quality and validity. Studying took a lot of time, especially when working full time. It was a sacrifice that had to be made. What I enjoyed most is that it boosted my confidence in practice when speaking to patients about guidelines. I also preferred that it was administered by clinical pharmacists because it reduces any perceived conflict of interest.

Patricia: I had been out of school for 24 years when I wrote the exam - not an easy feat - but I did learn a great deal in the process. I enjoyed the lectures/videos and have found the reference book to be invaluable when talking to patients about the meds they are taking. Since I had been out of school for so long and pharmacology is not my forte I needed to

study for many hours and missed out on social events that spring in order to make sure I got through the material. The actual exam writing process was certainly stressful but I felt I had achieved an accomplishment when I passed.



SPECIAL THANKS

In closing, the College thanks the naturopaths who contributed to this article as well as those who took time to participate in our confidential telephone survey about the exam. Deciding to take the course and sit the exam is a significant commitment yet one that provides many benefits for NDs who want to meet the *Standard of Practice for Prescribing*.



ND insights on the Ontario Therapeutics and Prescribing Exam

ABOUT THE COURSE AND THE EXAM

The course and exam address the competencies that naturopaths need to develop, implement and monitor evidence-based therapeutic plans. They also cover interactions between pharmaceuticals and natural substances, and how to appropriately prescribe specific natural substances restricted under general legislation to treat a variety of common conditions.

The course

Cost: \$599 including HST
Timing: About 3 – 4 months to complete the course. It is self-paced and can be completed on your own time. The College strongly urges Members to allow a minimum of 3 months to be successful.
Components: Online modules (30 hours) + interactive webinars (up to 15 hours) + self-study (about 3-5 hours/week)
CE eligibility: 15 Category A CE credits
Learn more: [FAQs](#)
[About the course](#)
[Register for the course](#)

The exam

Cost: \$599 including HST
Timing: Offered twice annually, usually in June and November in Toronto
Components: Includes a written open-book component and an oral component
CE eligibility: None
Learn more: See the 2018 Examination Timetable below

Exam Date 2018	Registration Opens	Registration Closes*	Timetable Notices Released	Exam Results Released
June 10	April 30	May 22	June 4	July 13
October 28	September 17	October 9	October 22	November 30

* this is also the deadline for exam withdrawals and exam accommodation requests

On average

75% of Members pass the exam on their first attempt, which is on par with a similar exam in BC.