



The College of Naturopaths of Ontario

Patient Information Guide

Understanding Sexual Abuse

The College of Naturopaths of Ontario exists to protect the public interest and views any form of sexual abuse or sexual boundary crossing as unacceptable. Sexual abuse must never be tolerated.

What is Sexual Abuse?

For health care providers in Ontario, The *Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991 (RHPA)*, defines sexual abuse by a health professional not only as sexual intercourse with a patient but also touching or remarks of a sexual nature directed toward a patient.

This means that naturopathic doctors are not allowed to:

- have sex of any form with a patient,
- touch a patient in a sexual manner outside of the consented treatment, or
- make comments of a sexual nature or behave in a sexual way towards a patient.

(Please note that this does not apply to touching, behaviour or comments that are of a clinical nature and are appropriate to the care provided).

What is a patient?

The *RHPA* also defines a patient as:

- A person whom a naturopathic doctor has charged or received payment from for health care services,
- a person who has consented to receive health care services from the naturopathic doctor,
- a person who was prescribed a drug by the naturopathic doctor,
- a person who had a health record or file created by a naturopathic doctor,
- an individual who was a naturopathic doctor's patient within one year from the date on which the individual ceased to be the naturopaths patient.

What Do Naturopathic Doctors Do?

The primary objective of naturopathic doctors is the prevention of disease through the encouragement of a healthy lifestyle and controlling risk factors. Naturopathic doctors utilize therapies that have a minimal risk of harm and apply the least possible force to restore health. They recognize and support the inherent self-healing ability of the individual person. Naturopathic doctors seek to identify and treat the underlying causes of disease and recognize that health results from a complex interaction of many factors and focus on treatment of the whole person through individualized care. The role of a naturopathic doctor is to educate and support each patient in taking responsibility for their health.

What can you do if you are feeling uneasy during an appointment?

1. Tell the naturopathic doctor to stop.
2. Ask the naturopathic doctor to explain what he/she is doing and why he/she is doing it.
3. Refuse to continue with the session if you remain uneasy.

If you think that you or someone you know has been sexually abused by a naturopathic doctor, please contact the College of Naturopaths of Ontario.

What is Appropriate Touching?

Naturopathic doctors use their hands to touch various parts of the body to assess and provide treatment to patients. When touching occurs as part of an assessment or treatment, you can expect that:

- the naturopathic doctor will tell you what he/she is going to do before touching you,
- the naturopathic doctor will ask your permission to touch you,
- you will be allowed to ask questions or express any concerns,
- you can refuse to consent to the touching,
- you can ask for another person to be in the room,
- you can ask that an activity be stopped at any time if you are feeling uneasy,
- you will feel respected,
- the touching will be needed for your assessment or treatment, and
- you can withdraw your consent or change your mind about any activity at any time.

What is the Patient-Naturopath Doctor Relationship?

The relationship between a patient and a naturopathic doctor is a professional one that is about a patient obtaining the care needed from a professional. Patients trust their care to a naturopathic doctor because of the unique knowledge and skills that they possess. Patients should expect that the naturopathic doctor will respect their needs and act in a caring and professional manner.

A patient-naturopathic doctor relationship is very different than an intimate personal relationship. If a patient-naturopath doctor relationship exists, naturopathic doctors are not allowed to have an intimate personal relationship with a patient, in or out of the clinic or practice setting. In fact, to do so would be defined as sexual abuse, even if the patient consents to the relationship. The naturopathic doctor is the one responsible for maintaining appropriate boundaries in the professional relationship with a patient.

The College has standards that describe how naturopathic doctors are expected to behave in order to show that they are acting in the best interest of their patients.

What are some of the signs of Sexual Abuse?

The following list includes some examples of actions or behaviours that are inappropriate on the part of the naturopathic doctor. These behaviours can be obvious or subtle, and words can be as damaging as actions. Please contact the College if you experience any of the following or if you are unsure about the behaviour or actions of the naturopathic doctor:

- any unwanted sexual attention or behaviour e.g. kissing or hugging in a sexual way,
- sexual touching e.g. touching your buttocks, breasts, genitals or any other area in a way that is not needed for treatment or assessment,
- sexually suggestive or seductive remarks e.g. comments about your sexual relationships or sexual orientation, or inappropriate sexual remarks or questions about your appearance or clothing etc.,
- sexually insulting or offensive comments or jokes,
- asking to meet you outside the clinic or practice setting or to have an intimate, personal relationship with you e.g. dating, and
- not asking for permission before touching you.

What should you do if you suspect sexual abuse by a Naturopath Doctor?

If you suspect that you or someone else is being sexually abused, please contact the College of Naturopaths of Ontario. Don't assume that someone else will do it; and don't worry if you are uncertain about whether the actions meet a definition of sexual abuse. Someone with experience from the College of Naturopaths of Ontario will look into the matter.

Sexual abuse by a health professional is never your fault. The naturopathic doctor is responsible for understanding and maintaining an appropriate patient-practitioner relationship.

Filing a complaint can be a difficult, and at times an uncomfortable process but it is important that the naturopathic doctor be held accountable for his/her behaviour and its impact on you. Complaints can also assist with learning and protect others from harm.

Counselling and therapy

Anyone who has been sexually abused by a naturopathic doctor is eligible for funding to cover the costs of any therapy or counseling that may be needed as a result. Our website has [information about Funding for Therapy and Counselling Related to Sexual Abuse](#).

Contact us

Your call or e-mail will be confidential.

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E-mail – complaint@collegeofnaturopaths.on.ca