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Common Naturopathic Therapies for Chronic Conditions

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Common Naturopathic Therapies for Chronic Conditions

**An introduction for allopathic providers to the various
supplements used by naturopathic doctors to treat
hypertension, diabetes, and hyperlipidemia**

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Thomas Chittenden Health Center
Project conducted May – June 2014

The Problem:

- **Complementary and Alternative Medicine has started to achieve greater public prominence – many patients report satisfaction and believe these therapies are cost effective¹**
- **Allopathic physicians are largely unfamiliar with the supplements prescribed by naturopathic doctors, and have trouble integrating these therapies into traditional treatment plans⁴**
- **Patients are not trained to evaluate the safety or efficacy of their medication regimens, and rely on their primary care physicians to provide that service– even if the majority of their “medications” are supplements recommended by an “alternative” provider¹**



The Problem (2):

- **Most supplements are not subject to approval by the FDA, and so there is no centralized source for information regarding prescribing practices, potential drug interactions, or possible adverse effects**
- **Allopathic providers need a reliable educational resource to learn more about the supplements their patients might be taking – and they need to know more about the common practices of “alternative” community providers**
- **There isn't a lot of communication between naturopathic and allopathic physicians. This barrier hinders the deliverance of optimum patient care**



Public Health Considerations:

- **Approximately 38 percent of American adults use some form of CAM for health and wellness or to treat a variety of diseases and conditions²**
- **An estimated \$22.0 billion dollars is spent annually on CAM self-care costs – CAM products, classes, and materials – with the majority going to the purchase of non-vitamin natural products (\$14.8 billion)³**
- **During my first week as a clinical clerk at Thomas Chittenden Health Center in Williston, VT, 43 percent of the patients that I saw were taking a supplement not prescribed by their allopathic physician (some self-medicating, some recommended by “alternative” providers)**



Community Perspectives:

“Something needs to be done to bring our community of primary care doctors together. I agree that it would be helpful if allopathic physicians were more familiar with how other providers practice medicine.”

**-Name Withheld, ND
Green Mountain Natural Medicine**



“I know that my [allopathic] doctor didn’t learn about [non-vitamin] supplements in medical school, but I always just assume he’ll know the answer, no matter what I ask him about.”

**- Name Withheld
Patient, Thomas Chittenden Health Center**

“You have to be ready for whoever walks through that door – and whatever they’re taking.”

**- Name Withheld, CDE
Thomas Chittenden Health Center**

Intervention and Methodology:

Intervention:

Produce a document about the most commonly prescribed naturopathic remedies for hypertension, diabetes, and hyperlipidemia that:

1) Outlines the naturopathic approach to the treatment of these conditions

2) Gives prescribing information including dosage, contraindications, adverse effects, and possible drug interactions for each supplement

3) Uses clinical trial-based evidence (and provides sources) to evaluate the efficacy of each supplement

4) Targets classically-educated allopathic providers



Intervention and Methodology (2):

Methodology:

1) Interview patients at TCHC to gain a better understanding of the level of knowledge they expect from their allopathic physicians

2) Interview local naturopathic providers to learn more about the naturopathic doctrine and prescribing practices

3) Use the information provided by the naturopathic doctors as a framework for further research and to structure the report

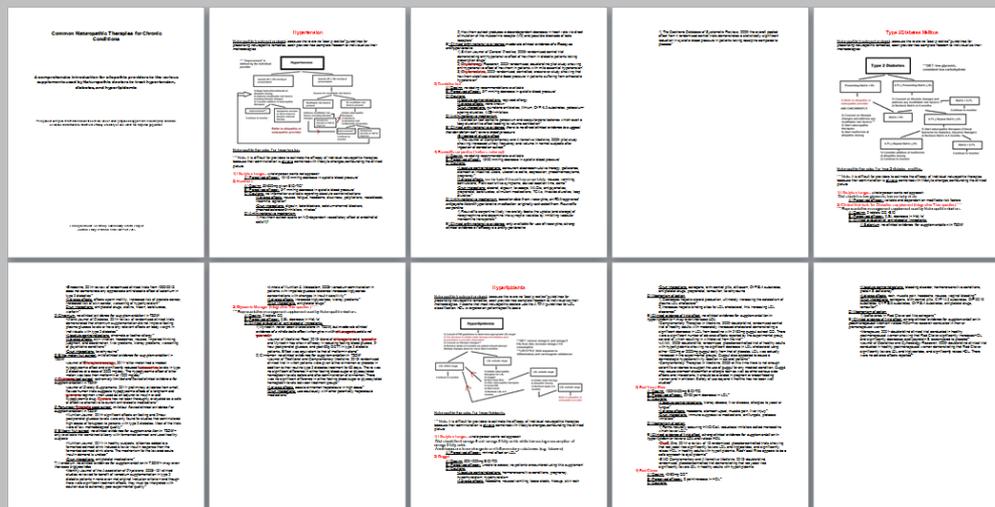
4) Offer the document to allopathic providers at Thomas Chittenden Health Center and ask for feedback

5) Assess the effectiveness of the packet after several months via anonymous survey with optional commentary



Results/Response: a work in-progress

- **Produced a comprehensive, 10-page document that outlines the prescribing protocols and uses clinical evidence to evaluate several naturopathic therapies for each condition described**
- **The packet was well-received by the allopathic staff at Thomas Chittenden Health Center and the initial response was positive**
- **Currently awaiting feedback...**



Evaluation of Effectiveness and Limitations:

Effectiveness of intervention: *unable to evaluate at this time*

- **Feedback from allopathic providers at THCH should assess:**
 - A) Quality of the material presented**
 - B) Ease of understanding and applying the information provided**
 - C) Effect of this knowledge on daily clinical practice**

Limitations:

- **There are no “best practice” guidelines for naturopathic providers, so the project was dependent on subjective input**
- **Too small a sample size to effectively outline the “naturopathic approach” to treating these chronic conditions (*I contacted 8 naturopathic providers and only 1 doctor returned my correspondence*)**



Future Directions:

- 1) Interview more naturopathic doctors to better understand the overarching discipline – makes for a better understanding of common prescribing practices**
- 2) Consolidate the document – simplify the information to make it more reader-friendly**
- 3) Expand the packet to include more conditions and supplements – maybe this is something better suited to a medical publisher! Consider an allopathic guide for alternative providers.**
- 4) Find ways to encourage communication between provider types in Vermont – our patients need us to work together!**



FIN.

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