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Naturopathic Physician Attitudes and Practices for Vaccination and Primary Care in the State of Vermont

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Introduction

- Recent increase in measles cases has sparked vaccination controversy.³
- Naturopathic physicians (NDs) have been recognized as primary care providers by VT since 2012.⁴ It is not well understood how NDs address vaccination with patients.³
- Our goal was to determine how Vermont NDs address vaccines and preventative care with their patients.

Materials and Methods

- 43 eligible NDs were identified from the Member Directory of the Vermont Association of Naturopathic Physicians.
- A 16 item qualitative survey was developed by student team and faculty mentors.^{1,2}
- The survey, conducted in person or by phone, was open to NDs practicing primary care in Vermont.
- Physicians were contacted up to three times.
- Data analysis
 - Survey responses stored with anonymous numerical code.
 - Qualitative analysis of responses was based on identifying themes

Interview Response Rate	Number	Percent
Completed Interview	12	27.9%
Declined	6	14.0%
Unable to contact or schedule	25	58.1%

Results

Among NDs who had vaccine concerns, topics included:

- Distrust of pharmaceutical companies
- CDC recommendations
- Administering vaccines to young children
- Autoimmunity
- Managing side effects
- Effectiveness

Components of Naturopathic Care & Approach to Vaccination

Quotes from Providers Regarding Vaccines:

- "You can sit on your soap-box and tell your patients to vaccinate their child, but if you haven't identified the reason they don't want to do it, you're going to fail."*
- "We have many people in Vermont who prefer an organic lifestyle; people are skeptical of conventional medicine."*
- "Sometimes people who are staunchly against vaccination will agree to an alternate schedule."*

Holistic Approach

Patients sought NDs for holistic and natural care modalities (either as main or adjuvant therapy) or due to dissatisfaction with conventional medicine. The most common reasons for patient visits to NDs were GI issues, thyroid disease, preventative care, and fatigue.

Modalities of Care

Patients sought NDs for safe, cost-effective alternatives to allopathic care. NDs reported patients often did not want drugs or surgery and preferred natural methods.

Alternate Vaccine Schedules

NDs offered alternative schedules for a variety of reasons, most to accommodate patient preferences. Some NDs also adjusted the schedule based on their own vaccine concerns.

Address Vaccine Concerns

Patients who have concerns regarding the safety of vaccines desire a provider who is respectful of their beliefs. The predominant factors influencing patients' choices were safety concerns, misinformation, lack of reliable information, and personal research.

Educate and Advise

Vaccination recommendations varied significantly among NDs. Approaches reported were based on the CDC recommendations, personal and professional training, Vermont school requirements, medical databases (e.g. UpToDate), or the Dr. Bob Sears schedule recommendations.

Quote from Provider Regarding Naturopathic Care:

- "[The word doctor is] from the latin docere- 'to teach.' Explain to patients what is going on with their health in order to empower them to make decisions about their health."*

Discussion

- NDs had a prominent focus on patient-directed care, offering a variety of treatment options, and giving sufficient time for patients to feel heard. These attitudes translated into a wide array of vaccine practices among Vermont's naturopathic community.
- Most surveyed providers supported the use of alternative schedules, either due to their training or to accommodate patient autonomy. Some NDs found alternative schedules increased vaccination rates.
- A subset of providers expressed substantial hesitancy regarding general vaccine safety.
- There were concerns about many of the commercially available vaccines. These concerns varied by provider.



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