

Advocacy in Ontario: NDs and the Health Human Resources Crisis

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The Ontario Association of Naturopathic Doctors (OAND) represents more than 1100 NDs in Canada's largest province. One of the association's core functions is undertaking robust and ongoing advocacy to position the profession as a solution to the human resources crisis in the healthcare sector. The association is initiating and supporting regulatory change to allow NDs to practice to the full extent of their knowledge, skill and judgment. The health system partners engaged to advance this work include the Ministry of Health, elected officials (Members of Provincial Parliament), cabinet ministers and the profession's regulator, the College of Naturopaths of Ontario (CoNO).

A key focus of the past year has been to increase NDs' authority to prescribe drugs and substances and to order laboratory tests. The association has made a formal request, for example, to add oral progesterone to the list of substances that NDs can prescribe, the gold standard for a hormone replacement therapy treatment. Currently, NDs in the province can access this treatment through topical and vaginal routes of administration. The Ministry of Health has been engaged early on in discussions around ND access to oral progesterone, and the first step in the process, which is a formal request to CoNO, has been undertaken.

Another recent project was a submission that seeks to expand the number of laboratory tests that NDs are permitted to requisition. This includes approximately 20 updates or amendments, in instances where test names or formats have changed, and 40 net new tests that will better allow NDs to support their patients. The tests span several important areas, including advanced immunological testing, chronic disease management, fertility and sexual health and environmental health assessment and management.

The association also prioritizes its role as a voice for the profession in consultations initiated by CoNO. The past year was particularly intense in this area of work, with five consultations and preliminary consultations that touched on areas of importance such as currency requirements, prescription reporting and the definition of naturopathic therapies.

While association staff do the day-to-day work of the OAND's advocacy, volunteers are the lifeblood of these efforts. Committees, working groups and ad hoc teams of volunteers work on projects big and small, including taking on the significant

workload that goes into the responses to the CoNO consultations described above.

The association's annual spring Lobby Day also relies heavily on volunteers. Its success depends entirely on the dozens of NDs who come to Queen's Park to meet with their local representative and help to tell the story of naturopathic health care in communities across the province. This in turn helps to make our regulatory "asks" more tangible to decision-makers. Furthermore, it is volunteers who secure meetings with decision-makers throughout the year, ensuring that momentum from milestone events such as Lobby Day is not lost. Engagement with elected officials and key officials at both the regulator and the Ministry level is one of the most important ways that the association keeps its advocacy requests moving forward.

The association is encouraged by a regulatory and political landscape that has seen the provincial government show openness to innovative solutions to the healthcare human resource crisis. We applaud the significant scope-of-practice gains made by professions such as pharmacists, midwives, and nurse practitioners. We remain convinced that Ontario NDs have a larger role to play. The association is committed to working with the regulator, the Ministry and other health system partners to bring regulations more closely in line with the knowledge, skills and judgment that Ontario's ND workforce possesses.

Kevin Draper is the OAND's Manager of Government Relations and Communications; Kevin welcomes comments and questions and can be reached at governmentrelations@oand.org.

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