

The Value of Naturopathic Medicine in Cancer Care

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An estimated 45% of Canadians will be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime.¹ This striking statistic highlights the need for all healthcare providers, including naturopathic doctors (NDs), to prioritize and maintain a working knowledge in cancer prevention and supportive care. This special issue of the *CAND Journal* features research in naturopathic cancer care, which holds relevance for the greater naturopathic and traditional, complementary, and integrative medicine (TCIM) communities.

While the mainstay of cancer treatment is conventional medical care, NDs and other TCIM practitioners can play an important role in cancer prevention, supportive treatment, and survivorship care. An estimated 33% to 35% of cancers diagnosed in Canada could be prevented through modifiable risk factors, including tobacco smoking, physical inactivity, excess body weight, low fruit and vegetable intake, and alcohol intake.² The number of cancers caused by such risk factors and others is expected to rise over the coming decades.² Given the strong focus naturopathic medicine places on prevention³ and lifestyle practices,⁴ NDs are well suited to help curb the rising rates of cancer.

Among people with cancer, rates of utilization of TCIM are high,⁵ with patients seeking care for various reasons including improving cancer outcomes, treating symptoms, addressing holistic needs, improving general health, and empowering themselves.⁵ Evidence supporting the use of TCIM strategies during cancer treatment is growing,⁶ which has resulted in the emergence of clinical practice guidelines,⁷⁻¹⁰ the Oncology Association of Naturopathic Physicians Principles of Care guideline,¹¹ and a formal definition of integrative oncology.¹² Naturopathic doctors, particularly those with additional training in cancer care, are well equipped to safely and effectively integrate complementary strategies alongside conventional cancer treatment.

Finally, although cancer remains the leading cause of death in Canada, mortality rates are declining, resulting in a greater number of cancer survivors.¹³ Current estimates indicate about 1.5 million Canadians are cancer survivors who will live for 25 or more years beyond their diagnosis.¹³ It is recognized that the

growing number of cancer survivors necessitates increased support for the long-term health and quality of life for these individuals. Post-treatment, people may experience lingering side effects, late effects of treatment (e.g., osteoporosis, infertility), mental and emotional challenges, and concerns about cancer recurrence. Naturopathic medicine, with its focus on whole person-centred care and lifestyle practices,^{4,11} can play a valuable role in the complex field of survivorship navigation and care. While it is understandable, and perhaps advisable, that NDs who focus on general care or other focused areas may choose not to provide care for people with active cancer, most NDs can provide support for cancer prevention and survivorship.

This special issue on cancer care features three submissions. Two papers, published by Standish et al. and Seely et al., report results from the large observational study called the Canadian US Integrative Oncology Study (CUSIOS). This study is a collaboration between the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine and Bastyr University. For transparency, I am a coauthor on these papers. The first paper describes survival of patients with advanced breast, colorectal, ovarian, and pancreatic cancer who sought care from a naturopathic doctor at a participating clinic. Survival was compared with that of matched patients from the United States' Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results Program. The discussion of the methods and interpretation are valuable reads to understand the intricacies, challenges, and opportunities with this type of research. The second paper describes the treatment provided by NDs to enrolled participants and provides the most comprehensive description of naturopathic cancer care to date, highlighting the breadth of treatments NDs utilize when caring for those with cancer.

Sandri and Landers wrote a narrative review of naturopathic care for those with prostate cancer under active surveillance, using data from clinical and observational studies. This review offers actionable and evidence-informed strategies which can support people during a time when active medical management is not indicated.

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Given the high prevalence of cancer and survivorship, the unique and holistic needs of those impacted, and the growing body of evidence supporting the use of integrative therapies, this issue will hopefully be of relevance to the naturopathic community.

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