

Remembering Walter Crinnion

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Those of you who have had the opportunity to learn from Walter will know how passionate he was about environmental medicine and teaching. He was an explorer and innovator with a fierce devotion to evolving the profession of naturopathic medicine but at the same time staying true to the principles by which we define ourselves.

I first met Walter when I interviewed for the newly created post doctoral fellowship at SCNM in 2003 and then worked with him in that position until 2006. What I remember most about 2003 was that the naturopathic profession and scope of practice in BC were being criticized, and changes in legislation were being considered. Naturopathic doctors were very concerned, as the profession faced intense scrutiny and it looked like our scope of practice was going to be curtailed. At the time, I was feeling disillusioned, wondering what the future held and whether I could actually continue to practice to the extent of my training. If not, did I even want to continue in the profession? So, when I was offered the position of post-doctoral fellow and moved to Arizona, with its broad scope, it was like being thrown a life preserver.

But it was so much more than just that. Working with Walter reignited my passion for naturopathic medicine. He became a friend and mentor. We talked at length about the trials and tribulations of naturopathic medicine in his early days, about how things had changed so much for the better and what an amazing future laid ahead if we could use modern research methodology to demonstrate what we had seen clinically: that our core therapies did indeed have merit and were effective.

His enthusiasm and excitement for the field was infectious, and his connection to the past generation of NDs illuminated the legacy that the founders of our profession left us: one of service, of treating people with respect and dignity, of staying true to principles, all while adapting to the changes in science, medicine, and society. He taught me that we have to constantly evolve and grow, but not to forget the history and the pioneers that came before us. He reminded me that our profession's history is one of perseverance.

I went down to Phoenix for Walter's Celebration of Life and was struck by the diversity of the people who attended, by the sides of Walter that I was not aware of, and by the paths that his life had taken since I worked with him. It lifted my spirits to see how much he was loved by the students, colleagues, and patients whose lives he had touched.

His death was a shock to all of us, and it shook me to my core. As we lose mentors and teachers, it's important to ask ourselves how we can stay connected to the principles of naturopathic medicine as we continue to expand our scope and add new therapies and approaches.

It seems we are reaching a point where the new generation of naturopathic doctors are beginning to shape the next phase of the profession and confront the challenges before us.

Walter's passion was for environmental medicine, which is based on a foundation of the naturopathic principles. The challenge for the next generation is to adapt to the new realities of the day and demonstrate the value and the necessity of our principles by not taking any shortcuts. There is no doubt that being constantly maligned by critics can be disheartening, but the answer is to demand of ourselves and our colleagues the highest level of professionalism, and to conduct ourselves with the utmost integrity and authenticity.

