



# Naturopathic Medicine Lowers Health Care Costs



## **Naturopathic Physicians Offer Less Expensive Treatment Than Those in Conventional Medicine**

Numerous studies have demonstrated that using non-invasive, non-toxic approaches lowers health care costs.<sup>1,2</sup> Patients with the greatest disease burden show the most significant reduction in total medical expenditures when utilizing integrative medicine.<sup>3</sup> Fifty-five percent of patients reported a slight to substantial reduction of their use of conventional medical care once they begin visiting an integrative medicine provider.<sup>4</sup> A systematic review of randomized clinical trials found that use of natural health products has the potential to reduce costs compared to conventional treatment by up to 73%.<sup>5</sup>

Naturopathic approaches to reducing cardiovascular disease risk factors, such as hypertension and high cholesterol, and symptoms of menopause save money.<sup>6,7</sup> Many studies have also documented cost savings resulting from use of naturopathic physicians to reduce pain, especially back pain.<sup>7,8,9</sup>

## **Naturopathic Medicine Decreases Prescription Drug Costs**

Many studies have found that naturopathic care results in substantially lower prescription drug costs than conventional care. Naturopathic physicians typically prescribe botanical or nutritional supplements to effectively care for medical problems rather than expensive prescription drugs. Patients who received intensive lifestyle modification and naturopathic therapy in just one year for type II diabetes improved all health scores (lipid levels, body fat percentage, etc.) and decreased medication requirements compared to those on standard therapy.<sup>10</sup> Integrative medicine users in two studies reported significantly lower prescription drug use of 48% and 61%, respectively.<sup>4,11</sup>

## **Naturopathic Physicians Offer True Disease Prevention, Thus Reducing Expensive Ongoing Care**

By addressing the causes of disease, naturopathic physicians reduce the need for repeated, expensive and often ineffective symptomatic treatment. A study published in *JAMA* found that patients of integrative medicine providers were significantly more likely to have obtained common preventive services, including pap smears, cholesterol testing, influenza immunizations, and breast exams.<sup>12</sup>

A recent study found that patients receiving one year of care under the supervision of a naturopathic doctor experienced a 3.1% reduction in 10-year CVD event risk compared to patients receiving conventional care. They were also 16.9% less likely to have developed metabolic syndrome.<sup>13</sup> This resulted in significant savings to society of \$1,138 per patient and to employers of \$1,167.<sup>14</sup>

## **Naturopathic Physicians Reduce Insurance Costs**

Studies of insurance costs provide strong evidence that including naturopathic physicians saves money. One study of special note demonstrates that the majority of patient visits to naturopathic physicians are in lieu of – not in addition to – conventional medical care.<sup>15</sup> Studies have found that per visit expenditures to integrative medicine providers cost only 52% as much as for conventional outpatient care<sup>16</sup> and that annual health care expenditures for insured integrative medicine users in Washington State were \$356 less than for non-integrative medicine users.<sup>7</sup> An internal Blue Shield study in King County, WA estimated that a naturopathic-centered managed care program could cut the costs of chronic and stress related illness by up to 40% and lower costs of specialist utilization by 30%.<sup>17</sup>

## REFERENCES

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