



Veronica Hayduk, ND

1. What started your pathway in naturopathic medicine?

Can someone be born into their profession? My last name is Polish and it's interpreted to mean, 'rebel', yep, that fits. Naturopathic doctors don't fit into molds easily, neither do I.

My mom says that from the moment I could speak, whenever someone asked me what I wanted to be, I always said I wanted to become a doctor. In fact, when I was a very

little girl, she'd buy me boxes of band-aids so I could provide care for the pretend 'shots' I'd given to my stuffed toys.

As a teenager, my mom owned a catering business with my stepdad, who was the chef. One year for his birthday, I bought *The Herb Book*, by John Lust. I barely paid attention to it; I simply found the cover and title appealing. Weeks later, I noticed this book hadn't moved from a table and I asked why. Very politely, he explained that the book was not a cookbook. What was this book for if not for cooking? I peeked inside! Whoa... Now, I was already the girl that liked to play with dirt and grow things, even when we lived in downtown Chicago. But it was this book that showed my cloistered eyes that dandelions were more than cursed weeds.

While most undergrads chose Pre-Med as their major, I chose Religious Studies. We are not a religious family, and this didn't make much sense to them. But it did to me. I figured I could learn the science subjects in medical school, but what about spirituality? I'd witnessed what faith can do for healing – even if the person was unaware of the prayers for them. I discovered that indeed we are all connected and at our core our religious underpinnings are essentially the same. We are more than a meat sack that can be repaired and then billed for it. We are spiritual beings having a human experience! The successful practice of medicine must address this and allopathic medicine does not.

Thus, it was not a great surprise that I did not thrive at a traditional medical school. While my classmates guzzled their diet soda, I was sipping my own herbal teas. The curriculum was very standardized. We were all to be good little 'cookie cutters' and to memorize and regurgitate and repeat. No free thinking required, no need to learn the patient's name. Emphasis was placed on what disease needed what drug only. Or if not that approach, then go to school longer to become a surgeon to fix their problems. My teachers did not mention or even hint at other treatments that may help their health problem. If a patient asked for 'something natural,' they



were immediately dismissed. If a patient wasn't getting better, then *they* must be doing something wrong or it's just in their head, maybe both.

I had an epiphany in my second year and thought hard about me and my inner circle's own frustrating experiences with traditional modern medicine. Amy was my best friend back in the 90's, and she had horrible bloody ulcerative colitis which created real struggles for her to keep up with life. For a decade, she sought help from numerous specialists and diligently followed every order. She continued to feel awful all the time. None of the dozens of doctors Amy saw ever suggested anything else but surgery or increasingly stronger medications to treat her. Why didn't anyone mention a food connection or maybe a nutrient deficiency as a culprit to the colitis? If I was truly going to learn to be a healer, it was not going to be from this type of medical school.

When I first entered through the school's doors of Southwest College (now Sonoran University), I felt a profound sense of belonging and I knew right then that I was finally home. This moment marked the beginning of a new chapter, one where I could fully embrace my passion for medicine and connect with others who shared my vision for patient-centered care – and herbal tea.

2. What do you like most about being a naturopathic doctor and what are some of your challenges?

It truly would be 'work' if I was an allopathic/traditionally trained doctor, I'd be bored with the monotony of the career and lack of connection. I love that I get to spend time knowing each patient and being their cheerleader guiding them toward their health goals. The day becomes even brighter when I hear that their ongoing problem is now non-existent.

Over the past several decades, my practice has encountered a variety of challenges. A major one has been helping patients realize that naturopathic medicine probably isn't going to be a quick fix. It's not a 'one and done' point of view for treatment. Sure, some issues resolve fast, but most chronic woes often require weeks of diligence with tenacity to experience significant changes. Then these positive transformations must be maintained. I can't go home with my patients and be their cook, personal trainer and supplement dispenser. Even if it is just a baby step, they must be ready for the change and required commitment for success.

What breaks my heart is when I hear someone tell me that naturopathic medicine didn't work for them. Even worse is when I learn that they never really tried anything different or stopped way too soon. A patient once visited me on a Friday to talk about a health issue she'd had for over 30 years. She then called the following Monday irate that her problem hadn't been resolved yet. Sigh. It can be tiring explaining to patients about the need to be patient.

3. What makes your membership with AANP valuable as a naturopathic doctor?



My membership keeps me up to date and on top of industry-specific notices that directly affect my practice. I appreciate that my dues are used to push the profession forward thus striving to keep naturopathic medicine relevant within the American healthcare system. The Find an ND section allows me to confidently make recommendations. We all need to have continuing education credits and the AANP offers choices that don't make me snore. Moreover, even after all these years in medicine, I still enjoy listening to the free practice development lectures and how they continue to be relevant to the times. As a result, I strive to use social media more effectively for marketing.

4. What has volunteering on the Membership Committee at the AANP meant for you personally, and for the profession?

Being a part of the AANP membership committee has allowed me the opportunity to meet fellow naturopathic doctors and work together to solve organizational concerns. For the profession, it's my intent that I provide a perspective of a longtime member and practitioner; our desires are different from those of newer members. The AANP values each of our unique needs and actively pursues our cohesiveness within the profession and the American healthcare system.

5. Anything else we've missed that is important?

In addition to being in private practice, I adore lecturing and public speaking. For the past fifteen years, I've been a part of the Integrative Medicine and Health Sciences Graduate Program at Georgetown University. For students pursuing allopathic medicine or already in the field, we aspire to make them be extraordinary practitioners. While I know I can't fix the broken system; it's exciting to work with the bright minds that could.

My work-life balance includes many hobbies. I'm still the little girl that loves gardening. It's my goal to plant every agricultural plant at least once, cotton has been our favorite thus far. I am too going to beat the American record for sunflower height! This measured 35 feet and I've plateaued at 22 feet, 8 inches. There is so much that can be cultivated with ease from a pot in a sunny place, even if it's artificially created. Let's all grow our own medicine, even if only for the soul.