



AANP Member Spotlight: Chris Azzola, ND



1. What started your pathway in naturopathic medicine?

I grew up in Romania and as a kid, I remember my parents and grandparents using all sorts of lotions and potions to help me feel better. My grandparents were medical doctors, and thanks to our Romanian cultural heritage and my great-grandparents' experience as farmers, they knew how to use natural remedies to support health and minimize the need for drugs and surgery. Of course, I didn't appreciate it back then – the mashed carrot-sugar tummy tonics, chicken bone broth, cod liver oil or chamomile teas, but I learned that nature provided medicines that help you get well.

I emigrated to the U.S. in the 1980's and continued to use some of this

knowledge to stay well, but I mostly didn't give it much thought as a career. In college, I studied business and technology and made my first career working in design for tech startups. At that time, I got physically and emotionally burned out. It was so bad, I thought I'd have to stop working at 25! I researched ways to regain my health and this restored my interest in natural medicine. After that, I never looked back. I often say I went to medical school so I could learn how my grandmother's remedies worked!

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

As an ND, I love teaching patients about their bodies and seeing them use our incredible naturopathic tools to restore their health. It's truly a career where I can empower people to help themselves and it's pure magic watching it happen! I also love getting to know people one-on-one and creating a customized plan for their health journey, which always keeps my work

interesting. Lastly, I cherish the opportunities to learn from teachers and colleagues so I can continually improve my practice.

The biggest challenge I experience practicing in California is the reduced scope of practice as compared to places such as Washington state, lack of insurance coverage and insufficient knowledge about the work we do and how we're different from other practitioners.

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

The AANP provides me with opportunities to connect with colleagues, stay up to date with continuing education and keep up with important news and events. The annual conferences are always a shot in the arm and remind me how amazingly powerful our tools are! I also think it's critically important that we have an organization that can advocate for us on the national level so that we can continue to grow as a profession.