

Medical alternatives foster healthy job market

Chiropractic, homoeopathy, naturopathy, osteopathy and the like 'have risen from the sidelines'

BY DENISE DEVEAU

For Dr. Bryan Murray, the decision to become a chiropractor began when he had a severe knee problem in his teens.

"By the time I was 17, I had seen quite a few medical professionals without any success. My intuition told me medications or surgery wouldn't fix the problem. So I decided to go into the chiropractic field to find solutions for myself."

Dr. Crystal Draper, who is also a chiropractor in Toronto, came into the profession because of a history of scoliosis and back pains from a basketball injury. "At 15, I started seeing a chiropractor and the therapy really worked. So when it came time to explore different professions, I decided that chiropractic was the right one for me."

Draper is also following a growing trend of alternative therapy practitioners by building her repertoire of skills and connections in the field. She is a certified acupuncturist, and works closely with naturopathic doctors, physiotherapists, massage therapists and others in



Massage therapy is one of many alternative forms of health care that is growing in popularity.

multi-disciplinary clinics. "It's great to have relationships with other disciplines and the option to explore different therapies. By working together, you can get the best results faster."

The common element with most of the practitioners she works with is a belief in taking an active role in recovery processes.

"It's all about getting them out of pain and helping them take control of their health."

Murray has observed that there has been a growing awareness and acceptance of alternative health care in recent years, which is a good thing for an industry that was once ignored by mainstream

practitioners. "Homoeopathy, naturopathic medicine, osteopathy, etc. have risen from the sidelines and now play a significant role in complementing the health care system."

Growth in interest in chiropractic training has definitely gained momentum in recent years, says Florence Silver,

director of student services and registrar at Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College. "The field is clearly growing as a career option for a lot of people. Right now we have three applicants for every position at the college."

Qualifications to get into the four-year program include a minimum of three years in an undergraduate university program, and a grade-point average of 2.5 or higher. Silver warns prospective students that the curriculum is demanding and rigorous. "It can be up to 20 courses, and you are assessed four times a year rather than two. You also have to work in the human anatomy lab with cadavers — that's important to know."

The discipline is equally rigorous at the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine in Toronto. According to associate director of student services Patricia Scott, enrolment at their school is growing every year. "The trend now is more people applying directly out of a degree program. Nine years ago, there were a lot of second-career people applying. Now it's a lot more students."

Naturopathic medicine is also a four-year program. Candidates must have completed a bachelor's degree from an accredited university. Beyond basic medical sciences, students also learn a range of modalities, including acupuncture, botanical medicine, homoeopathy, clinical nutrition and lifestyle counselling.

Silver notes that interpersonal skills are a big part of the profession. "You have to be a people person, because you spend much more time talking with patients. Whereas a doctor might spend a few minutes, an initial consultation with a naturopath can take from 60 to 90 minutes."

Glenna Morris-Calder at the Balance Naturopathic Health Centre in Halifax has always been a firm believer in combining her naturopathic skills with complementary therapies. "More patients are looking to alternative therapies and are open to trying different things. There's so much overlap today. I've seen massage therapists who are also osteopaths, and chiropractors who take acupuncture for example."

For Postmedia News