



Naturopathic Medicine: Frequently Asked Questions

A service for consumers from the [American Association of Naturopathic Physicians \(AANP\)](#) and the [Institute for Natural Medicine \(INM\)](#).

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Who ensures the quality of naturopathic medical schools?

Accreditation is an external peer review and regulatory process for higher education. Its goal is to ensure high-quality education and training in various disciplines, including medical education, in order to protect the interests of students and the public, and to ensure safe and effective practice. Accreditation is usually carried out by private, non-profit organizations that are “recognized” (i.e., approved) by the U.S. Department of Education.

How are naturopathic medical schools accredited?

Naturopathic medical programs that award the naturopathic doctoral degree (ND degree) are accredited by the Council on Naturopathic Medical Education. This process is similar to the accreditation of the Doctor of Medicine (MD) and Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (DO) degrees, and the U.S. Department of Education recognizes the accrediting agencies that oversee schools granting these three degrees. All three of these degree programs—MD, DO, and ND—must go through a rigorous process of initial accreditation, as well as periodic, ongoing re-accreditation—generally every five to 10 years, depending on the field—to ensure continued high-quality education and training.

Why is accreditation necessary?

Accreditation ensures that high educational standards reflecting the needs of a given medical profession have been established and are being met. Additionally, accreditation provides the foundation for practitioner licensing and regulation. Specifically, accreditation signifies that a college or educational program has met or exceeded the standards for:

- educational quality with respect to mission, goals, and objectives
- governance, administration, and finance
- facilities, equipment, resources, faculty, student admissions, performance, and evaluation
- preclinical and clinical curriculum
- research and scholarship activity

Accreditation ultimately protects consumers and students, providing an assurance that a program has met set educational standards, and that if said standards are not maintained, recourse will be available for the student.

Who oversees accreditation?

There are three U.S. accrediting agencies for the recognized medical professions. The [Liaison Committee on Medical Education](#) (LCME) is the accrediting body for the MD degree. The [Commission on Osteopathic College Accreditation](#) (COCA) is the accrediting body for the DO degree. And, as mentioned above, the [Council on Naturopathic Medical Education](#) (CNME) is the accrediting body for the ND degree. These three accrediting agencies are recognized by the United States Department of Education (USDE). In some fields, there are accrediting entities that are not recognized by USDE; in some cases, these entities are not legitimate. Thus USDE recognition is an important distinction to be aware of.

How rigorous is the accreditation process?

Accreditation is a highly demanding process. Generally, it involves the submission of extensive information and documentation by a school seeking initial or renewed accreditation, followed by two to three days of on-site assessment. The on-site assessment encompasses careful observation and evaluation of many aspects of the school including: facilities, administration, faculty, curriculum, student performance, and more. Members of the on-site review team and of the accrediting bodies are unpaid volunteers, and every effort is taken to ensure that there are no conflicts of interest that may interfere with objectivity. The medical school accrediting agencies are made up of professional members (physicians), institutional members (faculty or administrators of schools), and public members. Some agencies have student representatives as well. The U.S. Department of Education oversees all three medical school accrediting agencies in order to ensure that the accrediting process is thorough, objective, and fair.