

## Interview With an Integrative Medicine Educator



We spoke with Denise Dallmann, who has earned both a doctor of naturopathic medicine and a Master of Science in educational leadership and policy. She currently serves as the associate dean of the School of Undergraduate Studies at the regionally accredited National College of Natural Medicine, a nonprofit medical school in Portland, Oregon. Denise is also the director of curriculum & faculty development. She gave us advice on how to strategically pursue a degree in natural medicine or a related field.

### **What are the skills, interests and personality traits necessary for a student to be successful in a natural medicine program?**

"The field of integrative medicine has grown tremendously in the last decade. As research continues to support the effectiveness of integrative

therapies such as acupuncture, nutritional therapy, exercise, botanical medicine and mind-body medicine, to name a few, the field will continue to grow and earn credibility in the world of mainstream medicine. As such, entry into integrative health programs has become increasingly competitive.

"In addition to possessing a strong scientific background in areas such as human biology and chemistry, students interested in integrative medicine must also possess (or be willing to learn) interpersonal skills such as intercultural competency, emotional intelligence, self-reflective skills, ethics, teamwork and professional communication. These skills are becoming increasingly important as we are faced with a more diverse and sophisticated patient population.

"Managing patient health care and carrying the responsibility for life and death situations requires a unique combination of humility, confidence and of course, medical skill. Learners who can adapt to the rapidly changing field of health care, are interested in the intersection of technology and medicine, and are willing to engage in lifelong learning while remaining humble will be the most successful practicing integrative medicine."

### **What is the most rewarding part of a career in natural medicine? Why should students pursue a career in this field?**

"The ability to help patients in a way that conventional medicine often can't is truly rewarding. Conventional practitioners are excellent at what they do AND are trained to evaluate patients from a very specific and scientific frame of mind. Integrative practitioners take a more holistic approach to patient care, assessing everything from physical symptoms, patient history and family history to stress levels, diet and mental and emotional wellbeing. Some practitioners, such as those in Chinese medicine, evaluate patients on an energetic level and turn to ancient traditions in optimizing patient care.

"This holistic approach forges stronger relationships between provider and patient. It also stimulates deeper, long-lasting healing.

"Beyond patient care, there are many other exciting directions integrative health care professionals can take such as education, consulting, writing, product development, research and so much more. Opportunities abound!"

### **What advice would you give to students who are considering earning a degree in natural medicine?**

"First, learn as much as you can about the different fields and don't hesitate to ask lots of questions. Second, shadow practitioners and conduct informational interviews of health care providers practicing in the areas you're interested in.

"Here are a couple of tips when looking at integrative health programs:

- Every program and every school has a unique focus. Look for a school that resonates with you personally.
- Schools that have strong career services support will help you make the transition from the classroom to your professional practice. This leap can be daunting and having a strong support system around you can help make the transition much easier and set you up on the path to success.
- Programs that integrate science, evidence-informed practice, traditional medicine and interpersonal skills will give you the best-rounded education.

"Finally, keep an open mind, be willing to forge your own path and be open to lifelong learning."