

Au Naturelle



Photos by Renee Rosensteel

Drs. Darrell Misak and Maureen Tighe are among the many alternative medicine practitioners who are hoping for the passage of a bill in Harrisburg that would license naturopathic medicine in Pennsylvania.

Licensure would enable the doctors to prescribe medicine and do minor surgery, among other things.

Naturopathic doctors are licensed in 14 states.

It seems as though, almost before you can come down with a symptom, there is some new drug available to make it go away. And there is an ever-growing list of drugs that somehow made it through the Food and Drug Administration's screening process but will still kill you dead. So what's the answer? Maybe more pills. Better ones this time.

Or maybe not.

Naturopathy is a relatively new branch of medicine, but one that draws on some very old principles. Two local doctors practice the specialty from different angles.

Although each has a different approach, both agree on the core principles of taking a look at the whole environment you are living in and cleaning it up as much as possible.

Each doctor spends a long time getting to know a patient's medical history before taking any course of action—a history that goes beyond the traditional “has anybody in your family ever...” and addresses subjects such as lifestyle, sleep patterns, moods and energy levels.

Dr. Darrell Misak has been in practice here since 2001. His practice, Pittsburgh Alternative Medicine, is on Cedar Boulevard.

“Your body is as healthy as it can be, given the environment you create for it,” says Misak. “What we're doing is trying to find and remove the cause of your problem. It's about evaluating the pollutants in your environment and getting rid of them. Indoor air quality, the kind of water you drink, the types of chemicals you are putting into your body for a start. We're always searching for the why.”

Misak, a graduate of the National College of Natural Medicine in Portland, Oregon, one of the oldest natural medicine schools in the country, does not believe that his branch is the only one.

“Is there a need for modern medicine? Of course. But naturopathic medicine can be a part of the picture.”

Currently naturopathic doctors are licensed in 14 states. There is a bill in Harrisburg now seeking licensure for naturopathic doctors in Pennsylvania, which would enable them to perform minor surgery and other medical adjustments and prescribe drugs. House Bill 1998 was introduced into the state House of Representatives in October and a hearing was held the following month.

Like Misak, Dr. Maureen Tighe has a degree in Naturopathic Medicine from the National College, but she also has a specialty in Chinese medicine, which in Pennsylvania allows her to be licensed as an Oriental Medicine Practitioner.

Tighe, a 1995 Mt. Lebanon High School graduate and current Lancaster Avenue resident, had early inklings of her career path. As an undergrad at Penn State, she remembers going to the campus bookstore and skipping all the required reading to buy a book on herbs. She began to get seriously into naturopathic healing during three years in Alaska, where she went after graduation. She studied under a naturopathic doctor there before moving to Portland, Oregon to enroll in the National College of Naturopathic Medicine, where she spent six years in a dual degree program for naturopathic and Chinese medicine.

In her West Liberty Avenue office, she offers acupuncture and a range of herbal formulas.

Although she does sell single herbs, Tighe says classic Chinese medicine is more about herbal mixtures, a synergistic harmonious effect.

“I am not medicating symptoms,” says Tighe. “I am trying to restore balance.”

—MERLE JANTZ