

RESILIENCE AND RIGHT LIVELIHOOD

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For years I have struggled with the limitations of Naturopathic Medicine to truly create meaningful change for and beyond the individual. Barriers such as regulatory restrictions on practice and limited access to the tools that allow us to practice to the fullness of our scope; or the inability of many to financially access health care services that are outside of the publicly funded system. When isolation measures were enacted in Canada, I hoped the situation would prove to be a shining moment that revealed the value and skill of Naturopathic Doctors. We all know that we have the training, skills and knowledge to support clients who

struggle with the impacts of COVID-19, not to mention the ongoing care of concerns that are unrelated to the pandemic. I felt deeply frustrated at the sidelining of our profession.

RESILIENCE: AN EVOLVING DEFINITION

It is notoriously difficult to define the word resilience,¹ but one of the earliest concise attempts was offered by Holling in 1973: "Resilience determines the persistence of relationships within a system and is a measure of the ability of these systems to absorb changes of state variables, driving variables, and parameters, and

still persist.”² It has more recently been defined as “the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganize while undergoing change so as to still retain essentially the same function, structure, identity, and feedbacks.”³ This is an interesting image, one that invokes the idea of “bouncing back”, which more closely resembles Holling’s definition of stability: “The ability of a system to return to an equilibrium state after a temporary disturbance.”

BOUNCING FORWARD

Although many have expressed eagerness for things to go back to “normal”, returning to the way things were pre-COVID-19 may not be ideal from a social and ecological perspective. Framing resilience as the ability to bounce *forward* may be more relevant in light of the tremendous cracks in the system that COVID has exposed, faults that were already present, but often hidden.⁴

True resilience
requires foresight,
honest reflection,
and innovation.

Bouncing forward implies that stresses and shocks can be seized as opportunities to restructure and redesign our systems in order to better serve the planet and mitigate future harm. True resilience requires foresight, honest reflection, and innovation.

SURRENDER AND ADAPTATION

The ability to surrender and proactively adapt to what is (I think of the serenity prayer) are key attributes of a resilient and peaceful individual.⁵ Many Naturopathic Doctors (along with most individuals around the world) struggled to continue working during the early stages of the pandemic. Some innovated quickly and continued serving their clientele. Others discovered that the pause offered by collective quarantine was a potent opportunity to slow down and reimagine the way they lived. Some surrendered to the reality of the circumstances, and received the federal benefits that supported many Canadians in making it through. Those with families were suddenly wearing many more hats than usual and coped as best they could.

COOKING UP HEALTH JUSTICE

Other obstacles to the ability to truly promote good health are not unique to us. Only 2.31% of all health care funding in Ontario is spent on public health measures,⁶ which are deeply insufficient to impact the massive proportion of health that is due to socio-economic and ecological factors (Figure 1).⁷ While NDs are excellent at promoting healthy lifestyle habits, these are notoriously difficult to change in the context of an unhealthy environment, particularly for people of limited means.

What emerged for me was the opportunity to cook for individuals who were newly (or more deeply) food insecure because of the pandemic. For months now I have been cooking nutritious vegetarian meals multiple times a week for recipients all over the city. I have used my love of biking to deliver these meals, as well as boxes from FoodShare for folks in self-isolation after #BLM actions. I have acted as a Bike Marshall to create a safe space for activists speaking out against police brutality. None of this required my naturopathic training (except for our stellar nutrition

knowledge) or credentials – nor did it earn any money – but I felt useful. I was able to make a tangible difference in a way that spoke to my soul while I was unable to do my regular “work” as an ND.

Figure 1: The Determinants of Health and Well-Being in our Neighbourhoods⁸



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MANIFESTING NATUROPATHIC PRINCIPLES IN THE COMMUNITY

I love supervising at CCMN's teaching clinics, and joyfully volunteer as a clinician at a drop-in clinic for street-involved youth. However, my heart has long been disengaged from providing one-on-one care to individuals who can afford to pay for naturopathic care and often saw my care as a commodity.

In September of 2019 I began a Masters of Public Health program with a specialization in Community Organizing. When COVID-19 hit in the middle of my second term, it was a phenomenal case study. My immersion in academic concepts of community and public health, ongoing engagement in direct action related to social and ecological justice, and a much appreciated break from private practice resulted in me having the courage to retire (though not from CCMN or my volunteer practice). I am investing more time and energy into building Naturopathic Doctors for Environmental and Social Trust (NEST)⁹ in order to support the profession in advocacy. I am helping to guide my faith community in enacting the principles for a Just Recovery for All¹⁰ which speak to the need for a "bounce forward" approach to resilience.

With a colleague, I am cultivating a social enterprise which will see us partner with businesses and foundations in order to serve marginalized groups. Our hope is that this endeavour will replace the income lost from private practice while providing naturopathic care to those who would not otherwise have access. It also creates the space for us to advocate at a higher level for more optimal social and ecological determinants of health that benefit all.

As it turns out, when you build it, they will come. Due to the pre-existing housing crisis in Toronto exacerbated by the

economic hit of COVID and need for physical distancing, the city opened a new shelter in my mid-town neighbourhood. This happened quickly and created significant controversy and division in the community. I have been approached by my City Councillor to partner with shelter staff on curating programming for clients that will build *their* resilience, and to facilitate their integration into the community. This may or may not involve specific naturopathic tools, but it definitely is a manifestation of the naturopathic principles and oath, and fulfills the mission of this new approach to practice.

HOW DOES RESILIENCE RELATE TO RIGHT LIVELIHOOD?

Buddhist philosophy speaks of "right livelihood". According to the Right Livelihood Foundation,¹¹ this concept "embodies the principle that each person should follow an honest occupation, which fully respects other people and the natural world. It means being responsible for the consequences of our actions and taking only a fair share of the earth's resources." It captures the sentiment that "work" is meaningful not only for the economic value it garners (though of course it is important that we put food on our own table), but for the impact of all aspects of that work on ourselves and the broader community and environment.¹² In what way can our work be a practice of service, loving kindness, and compassion, and a true practice of *primum non nocere*? For many Naturopathic Doctors, clinical practice is a complete embodiment of right livelihood. For me, it does not do enough to fulfill that need.

In a rapidly changing social and environmental climate, crises such as COVID-19 will continue to occur, and will very likely escalate in frequency and severity. The United Nations has acknowledged the importance of prioritizing resilience of livelihoods as our world changes; although those of us privileged

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to live in Canada may not be the first affected by the worst of the environmental impacts of the climate crisis, we are certainly not immune.¹³ We must be resilient in order to adapt to changing circumstances and still feel purposeful.

I have always held that whether I earn a living as a Naturopathic Doctor or not, it is a core part of who I am. As I move through my life, responding and adapting to changing circumstances, I find my paid work, volunteer work, spiritual work, and personal work overlap more and more, approaching a true reflection of right livelihood. For me, resilience depends deeply on right livelihood, and vice versa: how can I practice Naturopathic Medicine in a way that embodies my values, and that contributes to the well-being of my community and the wider world? The sense of purpose and peace that brings allows me to respond to changing circumstances deliberately, creatively, and with love. As the late, great Ruth Bader Ginsburg wisely advised, "If you want to be a true professional, you will do something outside yourself, something to repair tears in your community, something to make life a little better for people less fortunate than you. That's what I think a meaningful life is. One lives not just for one's self but for one's community."¹⁴ 🌱

For those interested in reflecting on their own resilience and right livelihood, I invite you to start with these articles:

- Marques J. Right Livelihood. InLead with Heart in Mind 2019 (pp. 91-105). Copernicus, Cham. Accesable at: https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-17028-8_7
- Duncan D. Cultivating Right Livelihood. Resilience. <https://www.resilience.org/stories/2019-05-10/cultivating-right-livelihood/>. Published May 10, 2019. Accessed September 10, 2020.

OAND Members can access clinical references by logging into oand.org and going to OAND Community/Pulse.

Naturopathic Doctors for Environmental and Social Trust (NEST) is dedicated to protecting and promoting the health of all living beings, communities and the natural environment through sustainable and socially conscious strategies. Members are guided by naturopathic principles, and join NEST as an act of service to the wider world.

Follow NEST (Naturopathic Doctors for Environmental and Social Trust) on Instagram and Facebook for updates, or get in touch via email (nestnds@gmail.com) to get involved!

