

NATUROPATHIC MEDICINE

Treatment for mind, body and spirit

by *KALIFA SARAH CLYNE*

When you feel ill, you go to a doctor, right? One of those men or women in a white coat with a stethoscope around their neck who usually makes you undergo tests and sends you on your way with a diagnosis and a prescription. Have you ever wished there was an alternative? Well, maybe there is. For the next five weeks we will be exploring various forms of naturopathic medicine. Naturopathic medicine practitioner Dr Kandice Pereira says the main difference between naturopathic and conventional medicine is that naturopathic medicine treats the whole person, and not just the symptoms. "When you go to a doctor, you tell them the symptoms of a problem and most times that is what they will treat, the symptoms not the problem. "In naturopathic medicine we look for the root of the problem and treat that," said Pereira. "We use a lot of natural elements and we try to find the underlying cause. We will treat the symptoms as well but we also investigate the cause of the symptom." When Pereira left Trinidad to study abroad, she said it was with the goal of becoming a doctor.

"I have always wanted to be a doctor and when I left all I knew was conventional medicine," she said.

A few years into her studies, she started doing research on alternative forms of medicine.

"I started having doubts. It seemed to me that all the doctors were doing were giving medication for symptoms, then patients would get side effects, and they'd give medication for side effects," said Pereira.

In her research she discovered the six principles of naturopathic medicine:

1 First do no harm (All doctors abide by this principle)

2 Use the healing power of nature

3 Identify and treat the cause

4 Treat the whole person

5 Doctor as teacher

6 Prevention and wellness.

Pereira said it was then she realised that what she wanted was to become a healer and not necessarily a doctor. "It is about healing the mind, body and spirit and anybody can benefit from naturopathic medicine, from a patient with a common cold to someone with diabetes or a mood disorder," said Pereira. Her education, while similar to that of conventional doctors, also covered subjects such as homeopathy, botanical medicine and nutritional supplements. Although practitioners of naturopathic medicine are not licensed in T&T, Pereira said they can still legally practise. However, they cannot

prescribe pharmaceutical drugs to patients. She said though naturopaths preferred herbal and natural medicine, they often referred patients to conventional doctors if the patient needed a faster form of treatment. She admitted that there are disadvantages to naturopathic medicine. "It takes longer to heal the cause of a problem, and the longer you've had the problem, the longer it takes to heal. "Naturopathic medicine is not a quick fix." Another disadvantage, she said, was that it was difficult for some people to stick with a long-term treatment plan. "And seeing that we are not licensed, we can't prescribe medication as part of our therapy." The advantages, though, include long-term health benefits, increased vitality and few side effects because the treatment is natural.

In T&T there are a number of alternative medicine practitioners, like Pereira, specialising in methods such as reiki, acupuncture, homeopathy and hydrotherapy. While some members of the medical fraternity may frown upon the use of alternative medicine, Health Minister Dr Fuad Khan says he supports the use of alternative medicine, but only in a controlled environment. "There is a desire from the population to participate in natural forms of therapy but there is a need from the ministry from false advertisers who claim to be able to heal everything," Khan said. The minister does not support the idea that natural medicine, such as herbs, are better than pharmaceuticals. However, he says there must be an informed and balanced approach when deciding on treatment options.

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