

# the natural reader

The Clayton  
College  
Model of  
Empowerment  
for Natural  
Health Practice



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At Clayton College of Natural Health, our mission is to teach each student how to be healthy and how to teach others to be healthy. As our curriculum evolved and the College began offering presentations at its annual conference about practicing in the field of natural health, a new model began to emerge. This model provides a framework for practitioner-client interaction that is designed to assist the practitioner and to empower the client in his or her quest for health.



“I have been wrong.  
The germ is nothing.  
The ‘terrain’ is everything.”

—Louis Pasteur

# Background: The Allopathic Medical Model

Although the term “healthcare” is widely used in today’s society, the Western allopathic medical model is really less concerned with health care than it is with “sick care.” It is a model that has become ingrained both in practitioner and “patient.” The individual’s first, and often frightened, reaction to illness may be, “I must go to the doctor and find out what is wrong with me, so that he or she can fix the problem.” Because our Western medical system responds more often to symptoms—specifically or collectively—than to individuals, those who seek medical care in the United States are often perceived as merely a set of symptoms. The doctor will then identify the “disease” and provide a prescription to eradicate or alleviate the symptoms.

Thus the allopathic medical model is based on a diagnostic and prescriptive approach, which is both reductive and passive. It reduces the individual to a set of symptoms that can be treated with a drug or a procedure, oftentimes without regard for the whole person. It also reduces the individual to a passive role as “patient” (literally “one who receives action or is affected”) who follows the doctor’s orders.

If there is acute illness or trauma, this is often the most appropriate response. But, for a number of other conditions, particularly those of a chronic nature, the allopathic medical model has proved inadequate or ineffective. Natural health advocates have long been aware of the limitations and inadequacies of the allopathic medical model. Increasingly, health consumers are also searching for other alternatives.

With the advent of the Internet the public is more informed about health issues: what causes them, how to prevent them, what natural remedies are available. Upon receiving a medical diagnosis and/or a prescription, it is not uncommon for the individual to conduct an Internet search to learn about the condition and/or medication. Equipped with this knowledge, more consumers are questioning the medical model and choosing to take their health into their own hands. Often, they seek alternative practitioners and natural health professionals to assist them in becoming healthier.



# The Empowerment Model

The various fields of natural health care operate using many models and approaches to working with clients, some close to and others further from the medical model. Now the time has come to implement a new model of health and healing as an alternative to these and to the medical approach: the empowerment model.

Viewing the individual as a whole person instead of a set of symptoms, this model embraces the belief that, through knowledge, the individual can become empowered to take greater personal responsibility for his or her own health.



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# Creating the Environment

In contrast to the medical model, the empowerment model is holistic and active. In it, the practitioner approaches each individual from a position of equality and support. This model encompasses the environment and the relationship created between the practitioner and the client, who is defined as the person seeking an avenue to improved health. Together, the practitioner and the client create a “team” working towards that client’s greater health and healing.

The natural health practitioner must ensure that the entire environment reinforces the goal of the empowerment model. From the physical setting of the interaction to the demeanor of the practitioner to the language he or she uses, the empowerment model creates an approach that is both educational and holistic. The message conveyed to the client is one of respect, receptivity and support, wherein the practitioner serves the client with integrity and care. All verbal and nonverbal messages invite the client’s active participation and clearly communicate that the relationship is mutual, respectful and professional. From the forms that the client completes to the behavior of the practitioner, the nonverbal communication matches the verbal communication styles of a skilled professional.

# Communication Skills

Becoming acquainted with the client, accessing information about the client’s health concerns, educating the client about how the body works or the mechanisms of various natural supplements or offering recommendations on alternative approaches to addressing health issues—all of these take place within the framework of an open and communicative relationship. It is important that the practitioner invite the client’s participation in the relationship by using appropriately placed probing questions, open ended statements and conveying the nonverbal messages that say, “I hear you”, “I am interested in your concerns”, “I am listening”, etc.

To encourage cooperation with any recommendations or plans that the practitioner develops, the practitioner asks questions of the client such as “Are you willing to try this?” or “Does this sound like something you would be willing to explore?” or simply, “How does this sound to you?” Pausing regularly throughout the session, asking the client questions to confirm that she or he comprehends the information that is being conveyed, and paying particular attention to the client’s body language are all techniques for ensuring that the client is an active participant in the plan for health improvement that the practitioner builds with the client.



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# The Language of Empowerment

**T**o function within the empowerment model, the practitioner's verbal communication is designed to educate and support the client, while encouraging him or her to take an active role in his or her health. The empowerment practitioner avoids the allopathic medical model, which reduces the individual to a set of symptoms and requires only a passive response. Therefore, the practitioner should avoid using medical language. For these purposes, this is defined as any language that the client can interpret as being diagnostic or prescriptive, or language that states a claim that implies, "This will cure that."

Diagnostic language includes any statement that sounds as though the practitioner is telling the client what his or her problem or health issue is or could be.

Prescriptive language is any directive that the practitioner gives that tells the client what to do (e.g. take vitamin C), how to do it, how often (e.g. three times a day), how much (dosages) or what it will do to heal or "cure" the client.

Instead of relying on medical language, the practitioner empowers the client by educating the client.

Educational language is always informative. It involves clearly increasing the client's knowledge regarding health, nutritional, natural or herbal products, the nutritional value of a substance, how the body works, etc.

There is always the element of expanding the client's reach—much like teaching the starving person to fish because it feeds him or her for a lifetime versus giving the starving person a fish, which only feeds him or her for today. In that way, it teaches for today and for the future. The practitioner always needs to ask him or herself, "Have I given the gift of knowledge or have I offered only a solution for this one problem?" Within the empowerment model, the answer must always be, "I have given the gift of knowledge." With knowledge comes power, and for these purposes, self-power or personal empowerment.

The primary goal is for the client to leave the consulting session with information that will serve today and in the future. This knowledge may be about how the digestive organs process foods into nutrients, about the traditional use of an herbal remedy or about any other aspect of natural health that addresses the client's needs. Through knowledge, he or she grows empowered to make decisions and take greater responsibility for choices regarding his or her own body, life and health concerns.

# Examples

**E**ach of the examples below demonstrates first the diagnostic/prescriptive approach, then the educational approach:

**Example 1:** A client reports: “I have this rash on my face. It doesn’t really itch, but sometimes it gets scaly patches and then those patches itch. I just don’t want to put cortisone cream on it. What should I do? And do you know what causes it?”

*A diagnostic response:* “It may be rosacea. Nothing really will help, but you could try some witch hazel.” Or, “That is probably an allergic reaction, especially if you notice it more after you have eaten certain foods.”

*A prescriptive response:* “Don’t wear any make-up. Clean your face with witch hazel twice a day. Then apply aloe vera gel after each cleansing.”

*An educational response:* “The skin is the largest eliminatory organ of the body. So any toxins in the body that are attempting to exit the body often choose the skin as an avenue. This can often manifest as a rash. Assisting the body in the detoxification process will move the toxins out more quickly. Detoxification is aided by drinking large amounts of clean water, dry-brushing the entire body and receiving lymphatic massage.”

**Example 2:** The client walks into the session asking for a diet plan for losing weight. He informs the consultant about his typical daily dietary intake.

*A diagnostic response:* “Based on what you are eating, it appears that you probably have diabetes.”

*A prescriptive response:* “As a diabetic, you need to stop eating all foods that contain sugar. You need to only eat 1400 calories a day, and you should keep track of this day by day.”

*An educational response:* “From what you shared, you are consuming foods that are processed and have poor nutritional value. The nutritional value of whole foods far exceeds those foods that come from synthetic or processed sources. For instance, brown rice has a high level of B vitamins whereas white rice does not. Fresh, whole wheat bread, maybe even homemade, has more protein and fiber content than white, processed breads. Just moving from white flour and white rice products to whole wheat and brown rice can improve the nutritional content of your daily food intake.

In addition to considering the nutritional values of the foods you eat, the time of day and the quantity of food that you eat contribute to how the body metabolizes what you feed it. Would you like to learn more about this?”



**Example 3:** “I have chronic sinus problems. What is something natural that I can take instead of OTC anti-histamines?”

**A diagnostic response:** “Sinus infections respond well to lots of natural remedies.”

**A prescriptive response:** “Breathe Easy tea concoction will open your sinuses and relieve some of your problems.”

**An educational response:** “Sinus passages are tiny holes in the cranial bones of your face. The tiniest drop of fluid can cause pressure and pain. Fluid will accumulate in parts of the body as a natural response to try and ward off infection. Moving fluid out of the body more frequently by drinking larger quantities of water as well as ingesting herbal teas that have historically been used to reduce the collection of fluids in these tissues of the body are two ways that you can support your body while it is healing.”

If the client presents with a diagnosis that a medical professional has already made, and the consultant tells the client what to do about it, that is still prescriptive.

**Example:** “My physician diagnosed me with arthritis and prescribed anti-inflammatory drugs for me. These drugs bother my stomach. Can you help me?”

**A prescriptive response:** “You can take a natural anti-inflammatory amino acid called SAM-e. Taking 800 mg. a day would work best even though the recommended amount on the box will direct you to take 400 mg. a day.”

**An educational response:** “There is an amino acid called S-Adenosylmethionine, or SAM-e, a naturally occurring compound found in all living cells. Significant amounts of SAM-e are not available through diet alone so the body is primarily responsible for producing its own SAM-e. Taking SAM-e as a supplement to your daily regimen has been clinically proven to benefit brain and joint function, as well as improve your mood. You can buy this supplement in tablet form, and most of the time each tablet is 200 mg. If you choose to add this to your regimen, read the instructions on the container for recommended daily dosage.”

It is important both legally and ethically for practitioners to use only educational language during the consulting session as well as in all written forms, such as:

- notes
- intake forms
- release authorizations
- any others being used

It is not illegal to inform and educate about wellness and health, yet the interpretation of how the information is conveyed can make the difference in some states between being viewed as practicing medicine versus educating the client.

# Maintaining High Standards

The ultimate goal of the natural health practitioner is to educate and empower the client. One way to ensure the practitioner is always striving to practice with the client's "highest good" in mind is by maintaining a high standard of professional integrity and competency. Adhering to professional standards is a requirement of all helping professions. Below are the standards Clayton College recommends for the practitioner in the field of natural health.

Maintain a professional client/practitioner relationship by:

- Regarding each client with respect and dignity.
- Communicating appropriately—whether verbally, nonverbally or in writing.
- Maintaining a clean, organized and professional setting for consultations.
- Keeping your workspace safe and in compliance with legal regulations.
- Referring clients to other professionals whenever it is appropriate to do so.
- Showing respect for your colleagues and other healthcare professionals.
- Understanding and acknowledging your own professional limitations and going to others for professional support or assistance whenever appropriate.



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Practice legally by:

- Educating yourself about the legal limitations in your local region—and staying within them.
- Remaining within your own scope of practice and not crossing the boundaries reserved for licensed healthcare professionals.
- Reporting in a timely and professional manner any information conveyed by a client that could harm your client or others.
- Using only titles and designations that are allowed by law and supported by your education.

Practice ethically by:

- Maintaining the confidentiality of information that your clients provide verbally, nonverbally or in writing.
- Refusing to demonstrate or support discrimination towards clients or other professionals based on race, religion, age, sex, physical/mental/psychological disabilities, cultural or ethnic background, sexual orientation or socioeconomic status.
- Limiting the information you obtain about each client to that which is appropriate and applicable to the service you provide.
- Refusing to engage in any sexual misconduct with a client.

- Sharing information about a client only when it is medically or legally imperative.
- Protecting any clients who are minors by getting permission from their parent(s) or legal guardian(s) before serving them.
- Keeping all files in a secure place, and disposing of files in a confidential way when necessary.
- Acknowledging personal and professional limitations and always practicing within those limitations.
- Refraining from practice if you are under the influence of any mind or mood altering substance.
- Understanding the influential position you hold as a practitioner and protecting the ethical boundaries of the client/practitioner relationship.

standards

Maintain a professional consulting business by:

- Adhering to local laws, including those that govern the physical environment/setting, when you conduct all business transactions.
- Notifying the public accurately of your education, degrees and professional qualifications.
- Advertising your services accurately.
- Informing your clients and the public of your fees for services.
- Requiring a signature for consent for services from each client and documenting the services you provide to each client.

Maintain high educational standards by:

- Obtaining an undergraduate education and an advanced degree appropriate to your scope of practice.
- Participating in ongoing continuing education so that you stay abreast of the current body of knowledge in your field.

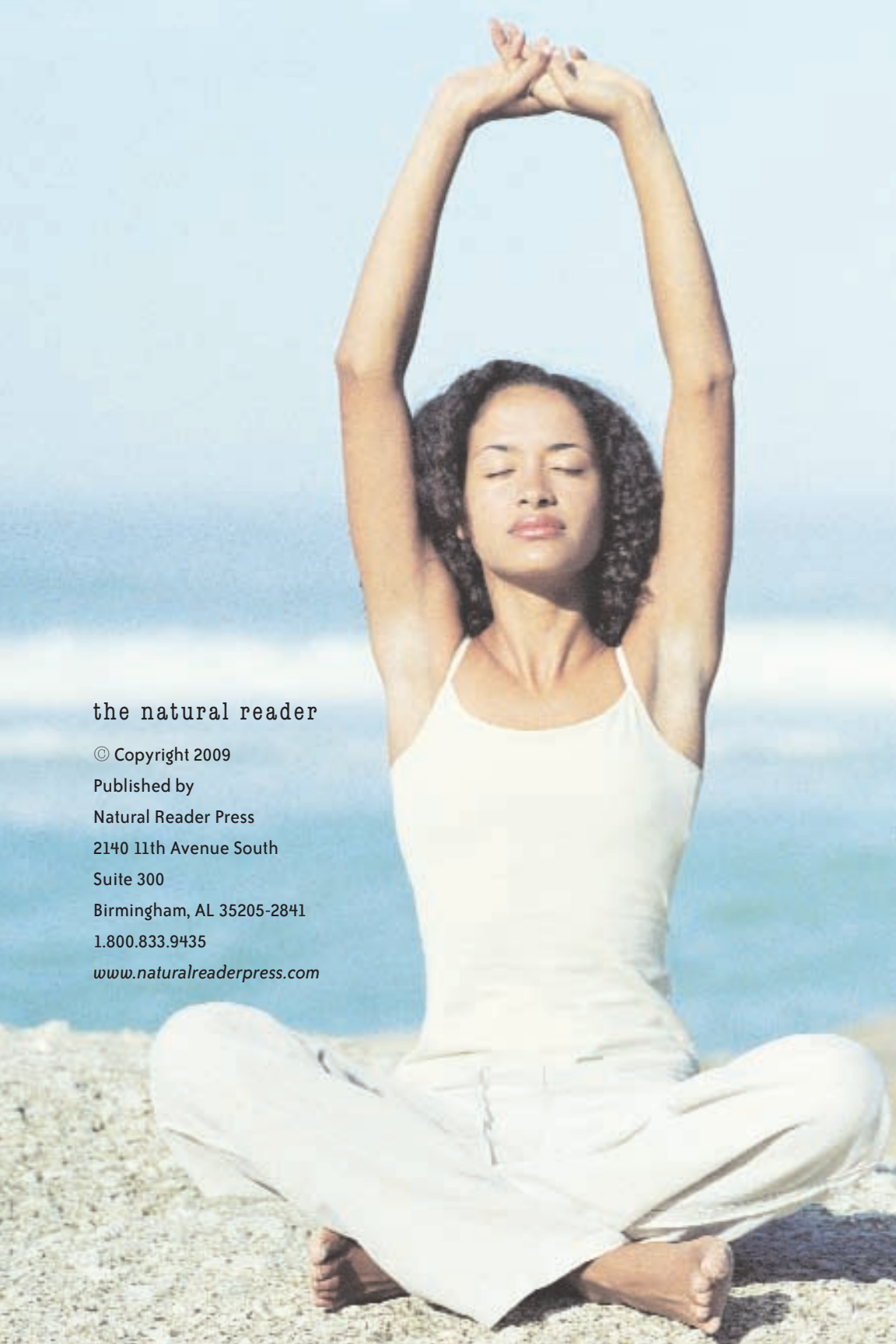


## Conclusion

The natural health movement has provided both practitioners and the public with a new way to view health and “health care,” one that stresses the importance of the whole person and acknowledges the right, in fact the necessity, for the individual to take responsibility for his or her own health. The medical model, which is still used by some natural health practitioners, contradicts these fundamental principles of natural health. By offering a new approach that respects the principles and supports the practice of natural health, the empowerment model will provide a framework for practitioner-client interaction today and into the future.

The Empowerment model provides a framework for practitioner-client interaction that is designed to assist the practitioner and to empower the client in his or her quest for health.





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