

NCNM WINTER COMMENCEMENT KEYNOTE ADDRESS
Dr. Jill Sanders, Dean of NCNM Clinical Operations
December 7, 2012
NCNM Great Hall

Good afternoon and congratulations!

- **Dr. Michelle Crowder (ND)**
- **Dr. Erin Mullaney (ND)**
- **Dr. Mia Potter (ND)**
- **Dr. Stephanie Mottola (ND)**

The last time I stood to address an NCNM commencement was at my graduation in 1995. It was a while ago. I made references to Star Trek: Next Generation and Bill Clinton.

We had two community clinic sites. Our main clinic schedule was one large spiral bound book kept carefully in pencil by the front desk staff. The classical Chinese medicine program was just beginning to take shape and take in students. And the right of passage in minor surgery was, and always will be, toenail removal.

It was easier to think of becoming a natural medicine provider back then. Our paths as natural medicine providers were simpler and were clearer. There were a few choices:

- Stay in Oregon, head back home or find a new place?
- Go to a licensed or unlicensed state?
- Join a group practice or try it alone?

Integrative medicine? Insurance panels? Do research? Work for a company? This was all pretty much unheard of back then.

But also back then, we weren't accessible to a whole lot of people. We were still an elite medicine, cash-based, available only to people who could afford us. Things have changed a lot since then, and some even bigger changes are headed towards us.

Even the way that NCNM cares for patients in our local community has changed. This past year, NCNM students and faculty were involved in about 17,000 patient encounters through our community clinics. We now have champions all over Portland who see and understand the help that we bring to their communities.

The Chief Medical Officer of **Essential Health Clinic**, who is also a vice president for **Providence Health Plans**, wants us to bring acupuncture to their free clinic to help with patients who have chronic pain. In my last meeting with him, he almost seemed embarrassed to ask, like he didn't want someone to hear. But we've won him over.

At **Central City Concern's Old Town Clinic**—a federally qualified health center, which carefully crosses all their t's and dots all their i's—they report that in some cases, NDs outperform the MD internists in patient care metrics. *This is where the rubber meets the new road.* We've won them over with professionalism, respect and staying true to what we do. But we've also won them over by helping them measure results and meet benchmarks—and by speaking their language.

Health reform is calling on healthcare providers to focus on *prevention, cost containment, patient centered care* and *patient responsibility*. Healthcare professionals are going to be paid for *taking care of*, not necessarily “treating,” their patients. Outcomes and payment will be based on how healthy a person or population is, not on how much the provider got to do.

How well do our philosophies and approaches to medicine fit into this not-so-new vision?

- Doctor as teacher
- First do no harm
- Staying true to the healing spirit of nature
- Prevention
- Treat the whole person
- Treat the root cause

Back in the early 90's, Andrew Weil, MD, was just making a name for himself. As a first-year student, I can remember that I understood from a scientific, evidence-based prospective that margarine was BAD. Transfats are flawed building blocks that make bad cells, which are more susceptible to inflammation and disease. Then Andrew Weil—MD—said “Margarine is bad.” And the world went nuts! Well, *we* all knew that – why didn't they listen to us?

Now we have reached a time when it is *crucial* that they listen to us. The education that you four new graduates received here has trained you to listen to patients differently and to approach health and healing differently, and, surprise, now it's what they want!

You know the sure, small steps to decrease inflammation. You know the foods that will support specific pathways to derail disease processes. You understand the value of exercise and bodywork. You know how to stimulate the meridians to bring balance. *And* you have been

trained to listen to the stories your patients and their bodies will tell you—about their stresses and their obstacles. You can feel, hear and smell the subtleties of disorder. Yes, you can also read lab tests, and, wow! That combination makes you an amazingly *valuable* commodity.

But where are you going? Who is going to value you?

According to the **Oregon Association of Naturopathic Physicians**, if all insurance barriers were removed, the naturopathic physicians in Oregon would increase the pool of primary care doctors by 15%. This would include being paid by the government to see people with Medicare benefits.

You probably know that you see these folks all the time already—in our community clinics and in our NCMN Clinic. They know to seek out care that is supportive, non-invasive and effective. In public meetings that occurred over the past three years and that continue to occur as health care is discussed and redefined, again and again people ask for affordable access to natural health care—to massage, acupuncture, naturopathic medicine and chiropractic medicine. I have heard it over and over, and people are *passionate* about it. In this country, access to *effective* care should not be defined by who can *afford* it.

Now it is *your* time to go out in the world and get engaged. Get engaged with your patients first. Every step you take with them will be a healing one for them and a learning one for you. Listen, negotiate, do what you believe to be the right thing. Every encounter with a patient will bring change, sometimes small, sometimes profound.

And become engaged with the healthcare profession in your community. Join committees, go to meetings, make one-on-one contacts. If they can't see you, they can't know who you are or the impact you have. Make it so they *can't* feel embarrassed to ask.

Thank you for the privilege of speaking to you on behalf of our community today. And thank you for the trust and investment you've made in NCMN and in the professions that we serve. Each time a new natural health care provider crosses the stage, symbolically, receives a hood and diploma and takes the oath, the landscape of healthcare is changed just a little bit more.

Like Charlotte's baby spiders at the end of *Charlotte's Web*, use your silk to take to the wind. Find new ground to create your home—connected and secure. And begin to weave.

And, since no commencement speech should be without him, I leave you with a bit of **Walt Whitman**.

“Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road,
Healthy, free, the world before me,
The long brown path before me leading wherever I choose.

Henceforth I ask not good fortune, I myself am good-fortune,
Henceforth I whimper no more, postpone no more, need nothing,
Done with indoor complaints, libraries, querulous criticisms,
Strong and content I travel the open road.”

Congratulations, NCNM graduates!