



The College of Naturopaths of Ontario

Guidelines

Advertising

Introduction: Why regulate advertising?

Advertising in health care is different from advertising in a business or commercial context. Regulated health professions are held to specific standards outlined by their college with respect to advertising in order to protect the public interest. Advertising can be a means to allow the public to make informed choices regarding their health care and allows the public to make decisions about which provider to seek out based on services offered, location, fees, etc. However, misleading, dishonest, or pressure-based advertising may result in the opposite. While it is recognized that Members are engaged in a business, the goal is for Members to provide quality health care, and for the College to fulfill its mandate of protecting the public interest. A Member's advertising falls within the standard when it is informative in nature and not persuasive, and where it helps the public, not harms it. In drafting the Standard of Practice for Advertising, the College followed the policy recommendations of the Health Professions Regulatory Advisory Council and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's Advertising Guideline. The policy recommendations outlines basic principles for all the health regulatory Colleges as follows:

- Advertising should reflect a balance between the public interest requirement and individual interest or freedom of commercial expression requirement.
- The public interest must be served by ensuring that the public gets accurate and understandable information so that it can make an informed choice.
- Advertising should focus solely on providing truthful information and should not stimulate a demand for unnecessary health care services.
- Advertising must not exploit the relationship of trust between patient/client and practitioner.

The purpose of this guideline is to provide Members with specific information about what may or may not be included in advertisements in order for them to comply with the College's Standard of Practice for Advertising.

What can/should be included in an advertisement?

The information in advertisements must be:

- accurate;
- true;
- verifiable by the Member;
- professional and not misleading by either omitting relevant information or including non-relevant information.

Providing the public with accurate, factual, objective and verifiable information to make an informed choice in health care is in the public's best interest. Subjective opinions may cause confusion and lack of trust.

Members can advertise the professional services they offer that are within the scope of practice of naturopathy. Members should ensure that they are competent by reason of their education, training and/or experience to provide the services advertised, or to act in the manner or professional capacity advertised.

Members can provide information about fees or prices in advertising. Any references to fees or prices must meet the expectations for truth and accuracy described in the standard of practice for advertising. For example, the fee, which is available to all patients, will include all components of the service described. This is not intended to prohibit a Member from:

- displaying or distributing a fee schedule and/or an explanation of the way fees are calculated;
- providing information about fees or charges in response to a request for this information;
- providing information on the funding models or insurance plans accepted; or
- indicating the forms of payment accepted.

The public is entitled to full disclosure of what is and what is not included in an advertised fee.

Price information should be exact, with all fees and applicable taxes for services clearly identifiable, and any conditions or other variables to an advertised price or fee disclosed.

Members are able to offer and advertise complimentary introductory or educational sessions that provide new/prospective patients with information about concepts of naturopathy, the practitioner, and treatments/modalities. However, advertising should not encourage the unnecessary use of regulated health services or be misleading.

Who can advertisements be directed to?

The information contained in advertisements should be directed to a specific audience, comprehensible to its intended audience, and should be created in accordance with the generally accepted standards of good taste of both its intended audience and the profession.

Members must not directly or indirectly solicit patients in person, by telephone, email, or any other means of communication that is not considered to be a public medium. This is not intended to prohibit a Member from:

- undertaking activities that are considered to be reasonably necessary to carry out normal and required health care notices and reminders with current or former patients/clients;
- periodically contacting current or former patients for goodwill purposes; or
- providing information to prospective referral sources.

Advertising is not the same as providing information to prospective referral sources, sending out notices and reminders, or periodically contacting current or former patients for goodwill purposes.

Where can Members place advertisements?

Any advertisement should be presented using a public medium. For example, newspapers, radio, television, websites, flyers, and the Yellow Pages are considered public mediums. Public mediums also include social media, e-newsletters or exclusive websites that require a membership. This means that, generally speaking, the advertisement is equally available to anyone who chooses to use it and that it is directed to the public, or a subsection of the public, rather than to an individual(s).

Advertisements also include any in-office promotional materials such as pamphlets, brochures, news bulletins, business cards, etc.

Advertisements can be placed on social media websites and personal pages, but they must comply with the advertising standard.

Who is responsible for advertising?

A Member is always responsible for advertisements about his or her practice regardless of whether or not the advertisement is made by the individual Member. The Member is responsible for taking reasonable steps to ensure that any advertising that references the services provided by the Member meets the Standards of Practice for Advertising. This includes advertising that is done by another person on their behalf. “Reasonable” in this context means understanding the expectations in the Standard, ensuring that the employer, or other individual or entity, is aware of the expectations, and requesting changes to any content that does not meet the Standard.

The Member should attempt, at the very least, to ask an employer, or other individual or entity, to remove any unprofessional references to him/her as an individual practitioner. For example, if the employer advertises that the Member is a registered specialist in naturopathy, the Member should ask that this reference be removed because no specialty class exists within the College’s Registration Regulation.

Many websites also allow individuals to post comments about someone else. A Member should not solicit or allow others to post testimonials about his/her practice on his/her page(s). If a Member becomes aware of any statements about himself/herself and their practice that are in breach of this standard, he/she should request the removal of any such statements, if it is not possible to do it themselves, and document such requests.

Summary

Advertising used to inform the public of the availability of naturopathic services may be considered to comply with these guidelines if it is information published in the public interest, and if it is factual, honest, accurate, clear, verifiable, and not misleading.

The following is a table of what is and is not acceptable in advertising. The list is not intended to be exhaustive. A checklist is also provided to be of assistance to Members when assessing whether or not their advertisements fall within the standard.

Acceptable	Unacceptable
Factual and clear statement of the service(s) and/or product(s) offered.	Creates or is likely to create unwarranted and unrealistic expectations about the effectiveness of the services advertised.
Contact details of the office of the Member, including email, website and telephone number(s).	Misleads, either directly, or by implication, use of emphasis, comparison, contrast, or omission.
Statement of office hours regularly maintained and the availability of after-hours services.	Claims that the services provided by a Member are superior to those provided by other regulated health professionals.
Non-enhanced photos or drawings of the Member or his or her office.	Uses endorsements or testimonials.
Statement of any language(s) other than English or French fluently spoken by the Member or another person in his or her office.	Uses superlative terms such as “state of the art”, “cutting edge”, etc. when referring to a particular service, technology, or product used.

Acceptable	Unacceptable
Statement about fees charged, billing arrangements, or other insurance plan arrangements and payment methods accepted.	Contains price information that is inexact, or fails to specify any conditions or variables to an advertised price.
Statement regarding the registration of the Member with CONO. This information must include the Member's name as it appears on the College Register.	Contains any claim, statement or implication that: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Either expressly, or by omission, that the treatment is infallible, miraculous or a certain, guaranteed remedy; b. A Member has a product that is "exclusive"; c. Guarantees the success of the service(s) provided.
Statements that refer to the benefits of naturopathy, and not to a particular Member or office.	
Statement regarding the certifications and qualifications of the Member which have been recognized by CONO.	

Advertising Checklist

When considering the content of an advertisement, Members may find the following checklist helpful. This is not an exhaustive list, but rather is intended to provide Members with an optional tool to facilitate the adherence to the Standard of Practice for Advertising. This checklist is not intended to be a substitute for thorough reading and understanding of the expectations outlined in the Standard and expanded upon in the guideline, and should not be used in isolation.

Is the advertised information:

- True;
- Accurate;
- Verifiable;
- Not misleading;
- Professionally appropriate.

Does the advertised information:

- Meet CONOs' Standards of Practice (e.g. advertising, conflict of interest, etc);
- Use a public medium;
- Relate to the scope of practice of naturopathy;
- Facilitate informed choice.

Does the advertisement avoid:

- Promoting a demand for unnecessary service;
- The use of endorsements, testimonials or guarantees;
- The use of expressions such as "will help" and "does relieve" which imply a guarantee;

Suggested Reading

Professional Misconduct Regulation;
 Standard of Practice for Advertising;
 Standard of Practice for Conflict of Interest;
 Standard of Practice for Fees and Billing;
 Standard of Practice for Restricted Titles;
 Health Professions Regulatory Council and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's Advertising Guideline.

Approval

Original Approval Date: January 16, 2014

Latest Amendment Date: December 6, 2017