

Meet Dr. Kathleen Riley

She takes a naturopathic approach to health care

by Mark Jahne
Editor



Photo by Mark Jahne

Dr. Kathleen Riley demonstrates Bowen Therapy. She uses it to gently move muscles and connective tissue to balance the body and stimulate energy flow.

Dr. Kathleen Riley is a big picture kind of person. When it comes to practicing medicine, she doesn't focus merely on the problem at hand, but on a much bigger scope.

That's part of being a naturopathic physician, a practice she has engaged in for the past 29 years. The 1974 graduate of Newington High School first practiced medicine in the Hawleyville section of Newtown in western Connecticut, moving her office to Newington in 1996. Many of her Newtown-area patients still seek out her services.

"More than 50 percent of my patients drive an hour or more to see me," she said.

She is assisted by preceptors – advanced medical students – and other health care professionals including a medical assistant. What makes her different from a more traditional "Western" physician?

"As naturopaths, we strive to look at the whole person," not just a particular illness or injury of the moment, she said. "Nutrition's a huge part of it. I work on nutrition with everybody who comes to see me."

She consults with patients every day to help them incorporate a healthy diet into their lifestyle. That, plus regular exercise and sufficient sleep, can greatly reduce stress levels.

"I'm always asking them what their strategies are for dealing with stress," Riley said.

She also asks her patients what makes life interesting for them. That's part of the naturopathic approach.

Riley's practice is called Eclectic Naturopathic Medical Center LLC and is located at 2434 Berlin Turnpike in the rear of O'Neil Plaza. Its goal is to provide gentle and effective treatments for acute and chronic illnesses.

She earned her naturopathic degree from Bastyr University in Seattle and is a member of the American Association of Naturopathic Physicians and the Connecticut Society of Naturopathic Physicians.

Riley is certified in advanced Bowen from the Bowen Therapy Academy of Australia. Bowen is a modality in which gentle signals of certain muscles are sent to the central nervous system to "reset" the body. This system of gently moving muscles and connective tissue balances the body and stimulates energy flow.

It can alleviate symptoms of back and neck problems, sports and accident injuries, frozen shoulders, respiratory issues, digestive difficulties, menstrual issues, hormonal problems, allergies, head pain, chronic fatigue, arthritis pain, strokes, bed wetting, infertility and more.

How else does a naturopathic physician differ from a more traditional physician?

- Naturopaths believe that the body has the power to heal itself and their job is to assist in this process.
- They look for the cause of the problem rather than simply treat the symptoms. They treat the body as a whole, utilizing natural remedies.
- They empower their patients by educating and motivating them to assume personal responsibility for their health.
- They look to stop diseases before they happen through preventative treatment, education and the encouragement of a healthy lifestyle.
- Naturopathic medicine uses safe and effective treatments to maintain optimal patient health. Health is defined as a state of physical, emotional, mental and spiritual well-being.

Naturopathic medical therapies include nutrition, botanical medicine, homeopathic medicine, lifestyle counseling, Bowen Therapy and flow essences.

"I feel very blessed to have this job. I enjoy a full family practice. I treat infants through geriatrics," she said.

Riley is a primary care physician for some of her patients, an additional resource for others. Her patient census is growing and that's good because she likes to keep busy and finds satisfaction in helping people live healthier lives.

"I will blend in wherever a person needs," she said.

She employs nutrition, botanical cures and homeopathy as treatments. She also provides a complementary medical component for cancer patients.

Riley explained that naturopaths are limited in what they can do because the law governing how they may practice medicine in Connecticut was written in 1922. It was recently revised and that helps a bit. Naturopaths train to the same level as other physicians and she is fully licensed for her practice.

Every new patient undergoes an hour-long intake process so that she can learn as much as possible about the person and his or her health.

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-Dr. Kathleen Riley

“I have a lot of seniors who come to see me because they are tired of polypharmacy,” the taking of prescription drugs for all kinds of needs. These multiple medications don't always operate well together and can leave them feeling run down or worse.

Riley practices what she preaches. She eats a healthy diet and gets plenty of exercise, sometimes riding her bicycle to work from her Newington home.

She didn't always plan to pursue a career in naturopathic medicine. Her initial idea was to become a marine biologist. She started her college career at the University of Connecticut Avery Point campus in Groton before moving on to the University of Puget Sound and then to Bastyr.

A career fair first opened her eyes to the possibility of becoming a naturopath and she's glad she made the choice.

Riley is a strong supporter of Hawkwing, a Glastonbury-based nonprofit that collects books for the Cheyenne River Reservation in North Dakota, a swath of land the size of Connecticut. She enjoys visiting the reservation to treat the residents and brings along various medical and other supplies including vitamins, minerals and fish oil.

She recently paid her fourth visit to the reservation, where there is a 25 percent infant mortality rate and lack of OB-GYN services, as well as a 90 percent unemployment rate. The Native Americans want to eat a better diet but they cannot consume the fish in the nearby river because they are infused with uranium and mercury.

She also does lead testing. Lead is common in the paint of some older dwellings and is a severe nerve toxin. The massive reservation is so poor that there are only two computers on its entire property.

The mother of two sons also volunteers for many years at Mercy Housing and Shelter Corp. in Hartford.

Carol Farley has been a patient of Riley for more than 10 years. She has high praise for the doctor's skills.

“She's my savior,” Farley said.

She had cholesterol issues and was tired of prescription medications that did not make her feel any better. Riley got rid of most of those pills and replaced them with natural supplements.

She has a way of knowing, she can tell what you need. My whole life has improved,” Farley said.

She not only feels better physically, her attitude and outlook are more positive as well.

“She's treated members of my family and friends. I recommend her to everybody,” she said. **NL**

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