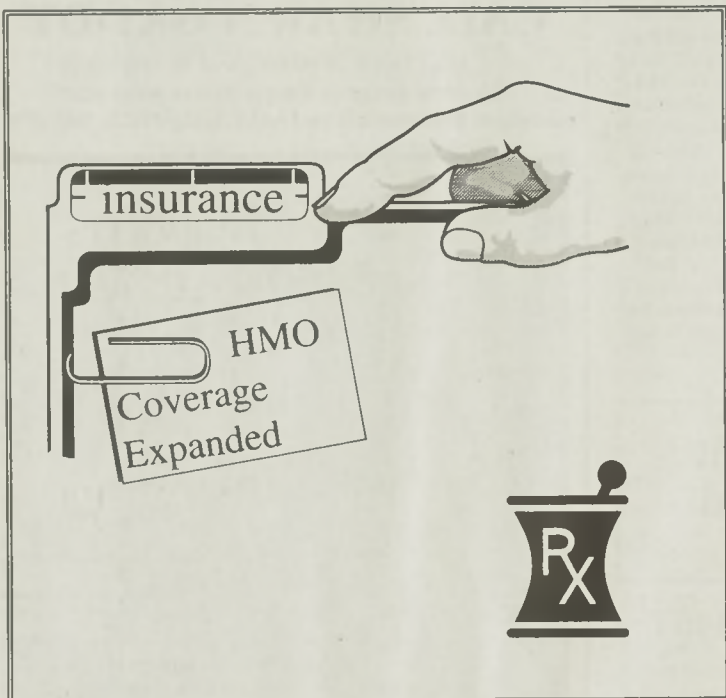


14A HealthyBody/Healthy Mind



HMOs to cover alternative health sources

By Steve Sakson
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK—They won't pay for shark cartilage pills and coffee enemas yet, but leading HMOs are experimenting with the demi-science called alternative medicine, hoping to cure ills when regular medicine fails.

It's a startling trend. Many doctors still view some alternative methods with great skepticism — the word "quackery" is banded about — and health maintenance organizations have a reputation for shunning all but the most reliable treatments.

While most HMOs already offer chiropractic coverage, a number are adding acupuncturists and massage

therapists, along with practitioners called naturopaths who use herbal remedies, relaxation therapies, yoga and more. The health plans are offering to cover this care just like they do for cardiologists and pediatricians.

On Tuesday, the picture will broaden when Oxford Health Plans Inc., a highly profitable HMO in the Northeast with a reputation for marketing innovation, jumps into the field with the most extensive program to date.

One big reason is that patients want it, even though hardly any of the alternative techniques have undergone rigorous, scientifically controlled studies.

A landmark survey, published in 1993 by Harvard Medical School,

showed that one in three Americans used nontraditional treatments, spending a total of \$14 billion a year compared with just under \$1 trillion spent on traditional health care.

"Consumers are already voting with their out-of-pocket expenditures that these services work," said Alan Kittner, a California-based consultant who helps HMOs set up networks of alternative providers.

"Quite often these things can be less expensive than traditional health care, especially if you can avoid hospitalizations," said Randall Huysler, an HMO industry analyst with the securities firm Furman Selz in San Francisco. "Secondly, there is a tendency for people that like holistic cures to generally be healthier people, so they are more attractive patients for HMOs."

More importantly, public health authorities are becoming convinced that at least some of these things may really work.

At least 41 state governments now require chiropractic coverage in some form. Six states require acupuncture coverage and nine license naturopaths. Late last year, the Washington state Legislature mandated that all insurers provide alternative medicine.

Until now, leaders in the movement to cover alternative medicine have mostly been small niche companies on the West Coast and upper Midwest. Also involved are some respected nonprofits — like Seattle's Group Health Cooperative of Puget Sound and Kaiser Permanente of California.

Even some traditional insurers like Prudential Insurance Co. of America and Mutual of Omaha have dabbled with limited programs.

Oxford's program will offer fully insured coverage of chiropractic, acupuncture and naturopathy coverage from a network of pre-screened providers for an additional premium cost of 2 percent to 3 percent.

In addition, members will be able to purchase yoga, massage and nutrition services from an Oxford-endorsed network at a discount. And they will be able to buy herbal remedies, vitamins, and other supplements by mail order, also at a discount.

"Our members said this was important. We responded by creating these programs as a natural extension of what Oxford has done throughout its history," said Dr. Hassan Rifaat, the company's alternative medicine director.

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Alternative health care has many names

The term alternative medicine includes a wide swath of nontraditional therapies, some centuries old. Some examples:

• **Naturopathy** (pronounced nay-ture-AH-pa-thee):

A field of practice that emphasizes the body's ability to heal itself. Naturopathists use vitamins, nutritional supplements and herbal medicines like ginkgo biloba to improve circulation, dong quai to ease discomfort of menstruation and echinacea to boost the immune system. They may also employ homeopathy, acupuncture, biofeedback, massage, yoga and other methods.

• **Homeopathy** (pronounced home-ee-AH-pa-thee):

Patients with certain symptoms consume substances that would normally cause those very symptoms. However, the substances (chemicals, minerals, even poisons like arsenic) are diluted to minute amounts. The theory is their presence will build up the body's resistance to the disease causing the symptoms.

• **Acupuncture:**

Use of thin needles, inserted at key points in the body to influence the flow of internal energy in the body. Usually used to kill pain.

• **Acupressure:**

Similar to acupuncture, except the practitioner uses finger pressure on key points.

• **Biofeedback:**

A method of learning how to consciously regulate normally unconscious bodily functions in order to improve health. By watching a monitoring device, patients can learn to control things like blood pressure, temperature, gastric functions and brain waves.

• **Touch therapy:**

A therapist uses hand motions over a patient's body to smooth out "energy fields" surrounding the body.

HEALTH BITES

• October is National Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

• The Breast Cancer Screening Program van will provide mammography on Wednesday from 10 a.m.—3 p.m. A mammography is an x-ray of the breast that can detect cancer up to two years before a lump can be felt. To be eligible for screening, women must over the age of 35. The cost for the mammogram is based on the number of clients screened. To make an appointment or for more information, call 347-4026.

• The American Cancer Society is offering Freshstart Stop Smoking classes on Tuesday and Thursday at 6 p.m. at 500 E. Morehead St. Suite 211. Cost for the sessions is \$25. For more information, call 376-1659.

• The society will also offer "Look Good...Feel Better," a program for women undergoing chemotherapy or radiation therapy at 10 a.m. on Oct. 28 at Presbyterian Hospital-Matthews, 1500 Matthews Township Parkway. The program will help women cope with the changes therapy causes the body and find ways to camouflage its effects with wigs, turbans and makeup.

• Dietitian Francine Grabowski and Dr. Daniel Wise of Mid-Carolina Cardiology will facilitate a presentation for people with heart problems and who want to reduce cholesterol Oct. 24 at 7 p.m. at Presbyterian Hospital.

• The Center on Aging at Bradley University is looking for African American grandparents who are raising grandchildren. To learn more about the survey, call (800) 695-5927.

• Information about Alzheimer's Disease, the most common non-treatable dementia in the U.S. is available by calling (800) 358-9295. Information is also available on the U.S. Agency for Health Care Policy and Research home page at URL <http://www.ahcpr.gov/guide>. Click on clinical practical guidelines online.

• **Did you know...**

• The Morehouse School of Medicine has found that African American women are more likely than any other ethnicity to suffer from hypertension during pregnancy.

• More than 75 percent of all African Americans are lactose intolerant. Lactose intolerance is defined as the inability to digest lactose, the predominant sugar of milk and dairy products.

• The Baylor College of Medicine has found that winter poses a triple threat for sufferers of psoriasis. The hereditary disease, characterized by red, flaky, scaly patches is most likely found on the elbows, knees and scalp.

To help combat the disease, Baylor doctors recommend adopting a winter regimen that includes:

• Getting as much sunlight as possible.

• Moisturizers and creams to combat dryness.

• Think you can't burn calories cleaning house? Here's the number of calories a 130-pound person burns in one hour:

• 377 scrubbing
• 221 mopping
• 208 window washing
• 168 polishing furniture
• 162 vacuuming

Forum reveals African American women at risk

By Larry Lucas
SPECIAL TO THE POST

Recently, I participated in a forum held by the Congressional Black Caucus. The subject was one that's important to me personally, and I'm sure it's important to all of you: the health of African American women. Saving our sisters, our wives, daughters, mothers, grandmothers and aunts—is a goal we can all applaud. And when we're talking about African American women, the need is urgent. Look at some of the numbers:

• African American women between the ages of 35 and 74

are twice as likely to die of a heart attack than white women in the same age group.

• African American women are 86 percent more likely to die of stroke than white women.

• In the 1990s, 14 times as many African American women have been diagnosed with AIDS than white women.

• Black women are more than twice as likely as white women to die of breast cancer. Fortunately, pharmaceutical companies are researching and testing new medicines for the diseases of African

American women. There are currently 107 medicines in development for heart disease and stroke, 110 for AIDS and 48 for breast cancer, to name just a few. All together, U.S. pharmaceutical companies will spend nearly \$16 billion this year looking for cures for these and other diseases.

As more companies look for and develop new medicines for a wide variety of diseases, we learn a great deal about how to prevent and treat these diseases.

To share that knowledge and to empower people to take charge of their own health-

care, we've put together a series of Health Guides. So far, the subjects covered include several of special interest to African American women, including heart disease, stroke, breast cancer, menopause, and mental illness.

What can Congress do to assure that medicines to help African American women get developed and that women will be able to get these medicines?

• Congress should reform the Food and Drug Administration. It currently takes nearly 15 years to get a new drug from the laboratory to the pharmacy shelf. Many

patients can't wait.

• Congress should also overhaul the tort system. Lottery-like punitive damage awards chill the incentives for research. High-risk products women need is the chief casualty. For example, one company stopped research on a vaccine for preventing the transmission of the AIDS virus from infected mothers to unborn children.

The reason: concerns about law suits.

• Congress should make sure that women have access to the medicines their physicians think would work best

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Asian spice can keep body healthy

SPECIAL TO THE POST

Anyone who has ever eaten Indian food has tasted the spice curcumin.

Commonly known as curcumin and turmeric, curcumin is not only used widely in Asia for cooking, but also to treat skin inflammations and ailments. Like many other common flavorings, including garlic, onions, parsley and licorice, research studies are beginning to show preliminary evidence that curcumin, too, may have anti-cancer properties.

At the recent annual conference of the American Institute for Cancer Research, investigators summarized some small studies that have begun to experiment with curcumin's effects on skin, breast and colon cancers in laboratory animals and tissue samples:

• **Breast cancer:** In a study with breast cancer cells, researchers at Pennsylvania State University found that curcumin may inhibit the activity of certain proteins that play a role in cancer development. This study is

ongoing and has yet to identify other key factors that may interact in combination with the curcumin to affect cell proliferation.

• **Skin cancer:** Researchers at Chiang Mai University in Thailand found that mice treated with curcumin before being exposed to carcinogens had significantly lower incidence of skin tumor formation and development than mice who did not receive the treatment. More research needs to be conducted in humans.

• **Tissue Inflammation:** Scientists from the State University of New Jersey found that curcumin suppressed inflammation caused by an enzyme called nitric oxide, which is produced by the body as an immune response to infections and to harmful substances. In this study, curcumin limited nitric oxide's effects to damage cells and possibly leading to cancer development.

Because a growing number of plant foods, including

fruits, vegetables, grains and herbs, are being identified as having possible cancer-fighting substances, the American Institute for Cancer Research advises a wide variety of these foods every day.

For a free brochure on how to eat for better health and lower cancer risk, send a stamped, self-addressed business-sized envelope to the American Institute for Cancer Research, Dept. TLP, Washington, DC 20069.