

HMOs to offer some more options

Continued from page 14A

Still, respected skeptics abound.

They're particularly worried that desperately ill patients are abandoning traditional methods and are getting sicker.

"One HMO frankly admitted they were referring AIDS patients to this quack clinic where they were giving them dietary supplements," said William Jarvis, president of the National Council Against Health Fraud. "They said it's cheaper than AZT and the patient won't be around as long to collect."

Jarvis, a professor of public health at California's Loma Linda University, refused to identify the HMO.

A 1991 study by psychologist Barrie Cassileth of the University of North Carolina found that coffee enemas given terminal cancer patients didn't work and the recipients were in greater discomfort than those who took chemotherapy.

Serious kidney damage has resulted from chelation therapy - injections of a substance called EDTA which normally are used to combat lead poisoning but also are popular as an alternative treatment for heart disease.

HMOs stress that they will

Sisters focus of studies

Continued from page 14A

for them, as individuals. Different people respond to medicines in different ways, and some of these differences are due to racial and ethnic factors. Whether patients are in Medicaid or private managed-care plans, they should have access to the most appropriate medicines.

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Larry Lucas is Associate Vice President of the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA).

only pay for the alternative therapies that have already shown wide acceptance and safety - shark cartilage to ward off cancer is definitely out. All authorized practitioners must carry malpractice insurance and most of them can only go to work after a referral from a doctor.

Oxford's program requires the nontraditional practitioner to submit a care plan for each member for pre-approval by Oxford before extensive treatment begins.

Washington's Group Health limits coverage to specific ailments. Acupuncture, for instance, is covered only for 10 conditions including chronic neck and back pain, migraines, arthritis and cancer-related pain. Group Health doesn't pay for any herbals, vitamins or supplements.

Dr. David Eisenberg, the Harvard doctor who wrote the

seminal 1993 alternative medicine study, praised the expanded coverage, saying it will help scientists conduct

larger and more authoritative studies to see what really works for broad groups of patients.

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