

## ■ Why patients use alternative health care

A study in the May 20, 1998 issue of *The Journal of the American Medical Association* finds some very interesting reasons why people are willing to go outside the standard medical sick care system and pay for these services out of their own pocket without benefit of a third party payor.

The study first asked participants to rate the three most “bothersome” or “serious” conditions they are faced with. Back pain came out on top at 19.7% followed by allergies at 16.6%, strains / sprains, 15.7%, digestive problems at 14.5% and lung problems at 13%.

The top four wellness disciplines chosen were Chiropractic at 15.7%, lifestyle and diet changes at 8%, exercise at 7.2% and relaxation techniques at 6.9%.

The study also tried to find those things that would predict which patients would be more likely to use a wellness discipline. These included being more educated, being a cultural creative, having a transformational experience that changed a person's world view, having poorer overall health, believing in the importance of body, mind and spirit and reporting any of the following, anxiety, back problems, chronic pain or urinary tract infections.

5% of the study participants used wellness disciplines as their primary form of health care. Their reasons were because they distrusted medical doctors and hospitals, they desired control over their health, they were dissatisfied with medical care and had a strong belief in the importance of their inner life and experiences.

People who used the wellness disciplines reported that the benefits were 1) I get relief for my symptoms, the pain or discomfort is less or goes away, I feel better. 2) The treatment works better for my particular health problem than standards medicine's. 3) The treatment promotes health rather than just focusing on illness.

Or, in other words, people having health problems who were more educated, creative and understand the importance of a healthy mind, body and spirit were more likely to utilize wellness disciplines such as chiropractic. Sounds like a good group. ▲

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## ■ Editorial Defining “Alternative”

More and more the tide is turning. Everyday more people look to other Health Care systems for answers that the Medical Sick Care system cannot deliver. There's lots of talk in the media these days about “Alternative” health care. Dr. David Eisenberg of Harvard University defines “Alternative” health care as those disciplines that are not taught at Medical Schools or available in hospitals. This is a pretty good definition but it does raise a communications problem in people's minds.

In most situations, the word “alternative” implies that what these disciplines offer is simply a different way to accomplish the same goals that medicine has, the treatment of disease and symptoms. People in the “alternative” fields tend to see what they do as not so much the treatment of disease and symptoms (which is the practice of medicine regardless of the treatment) but a way to restore and maintain health, a very different goal than that of medicine.

Webster's defines “wellness” as the quality or state of being in good health especially as an actively sought goal. Health is defined as a state of physical, mental and social well-being, not just a lack of symptoms. We feel that perhaps a better name than “alternative” disciplines would be “wellness” disciplines. This more accurately describes the goals of the wellness disciplines. ▲

## Chiropractic malpractice: fewer claims than MDs

A study in the November 11, 1998 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* reports that the number of malpractice claims made against chiropractors is much less than that of medical practitioners.

In 1990, there were **2.7 claims** for every 100 chiropractic malpractice policy holders in the United States. In that same year, there were **7.7 claims** for every 100 medical malpractice policy holders, a **285% higher rate** than chiropractic's rate.

The 1996 figures are even more out of balance. In 1996, there were **2.6 claims** for every 100 chiropractic policy holders, a slight decrease. There were **9.0 claims** for every 100 medical policy holders in that same year, a **333% higher rate** than chiropractic and a 1.3% higher rate than their 1990 figures. Overall in the 1990s, the chiropractic rate remained consistently between 2.2 and 3 claims per 100 policy holders and medicine's rate fluctuated between 7.7 and 9.8.

According to the authors of the study, "The best explanation for the relative infrequency and lower severity of claims against [wellness] practitioners concerns the nature of [wellness] therapies. **Since rates of medical injury increase with invasiveness of therapy, fewer bases for suit are likely to present in the largely noninvasive [wellness] setting.** Moreover, injuries that do occur may not be as severe." ▲

## ■ Chiropractic risks: What does the evidence say?

Ian Coulter, Ph.D. is the author of an article in the September 1998 issue of the journal *Integrative Medicine* that examines the risks associated with Chiropractic care. The article, entitled "Efficacy and Risks of Chiropractic Manipulation: What Does the Evidence Suggest?" points out some interesting facts:

- Chiropractors perform more than **90%** of spinal manipulations. (Manipulation is the generic, non-specific medical term for Adjustment).
- The risk of complication with cervical (neck) adjustments is **6.39 per 10 million** adjustments.
- The risk of complication with lumbar (low back) adjustments is **1 in 100 million** adjustments.

The risk of complication in some common medical procedures and medications were not near as good:

- The risk of complication with the use of NSAIDS (aspirin, Tylenol, ibuprofen, etc.) is **3.2 in 1000**.
- The risk of complication in cervical spine surgeries is **15.6 in 1000**.

By way of commentary, there has been a lot of news about the dangers of Chiropractic care over the past few months. This article clearly points out that Chiropractic procedures are significantly safer than many common medical procedures. For the best reflection of how safe Chiropractic is, ask your Chiropractor how much his/her malpractice insurance costs. Then ask your medical doctor the same question. The difference will surprise you. ▲

**“Medicine is now a high risk industry, like aviation. But, the chance of dying in an aviation accident is one in 2 million, while the risk of dying from a medical accident is one in 200!”**

*– Dr. Lucian Leape,  
Harvard School of Public Health*

## ■ MDs don't provide patients enough information to make good decisions

The December 22/29, 1999 issue of *the Journal of the American Medical Association* reports that primary-care doctors seldom provide patients with enough information to make an informed choice about their treatment.

In reviewing recordings of 1,057 doctor-patient discussions concerning 3552 health care decisions, the researchers found that doctors provided enough information for the patient to make a completely informed choice in only 9% of the cases.

In other words, in 91% of the doctor-patient encounters, some information that would have allowed a patient to make a better decision was left out of the discussion.

Even worse, the researchers report that "primary care physicians frequently made decisions without discussing the intervention with the patient or seeking their involvement."

They go on to conclude that "these findings suggest that the ethical model of informed decision-making is not routinely applied in office practice."

By way of commentary, your doctor, any doctor, has a responsibility to make sure that you understand all of the ramifications of the decisions you make regarding your health care. Your responsibility is to make sure that you ask questions about anything you do not understand. You must completely understand any health problem you are facing, including any alternative approaches, and their pros and cons.

Your health is your responsibility. Don't make any health care decisions without knowing all the facts. Get 5th opinions, check the internet, visit your library but know as much about any problems as possible. No one has more interest in your health than you.

## ■ Managed care forcing doctors to treat cases beyond their abilities

A report in the December 23, 1999 issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that nearly 1 out of 4 primary care physicians feel that they are not qualified to perform the level of care their managed care arrangements expect them to.

24% of more than 12,000 doctors surveyed felt they were not capable of delivering the level of complex care that would keep the patient from having to be referred to more expensive (not to mention experienced) specialists.

Managed care plans (including government funded ones) use primary care doctors as gatekeepers to limit the number of patients going to more costly (not to mention experienced) specialists. Many times, HMOs will offer doctors bonuses for low referral rates.

38% of specialists questioned felt the primary care doctors were waiting too long to refer the patients for more specialized care. The researchers go on to say, "among specialists, more than 1 in 3 reported that the complexity or severity of patients' conditions at the time the patients were referred to them by primary care physicians was greater than it should be."

The study did not determine whether any patients received sub-standard care from primary care doctors who have low referral rates to specialists.

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## ■ Parents Not Told Of Errors

The *Alternative Health Newsletter* reports on November 21, 2000 that the journal *Archives of Disease in Childhood* found that almost half of the parents of children in hospitals who received the wrong medication or dosage were never informed of the mistakes.

The study was done at the Royal Hospital for Sick Children in Glasgow, Scotland. The hospital specializes in taking care of children and babies that require risky and complex treatment.

It was found that one mistake happened for every 662 hospitalized children. While most of the errors were deemed "minor", 10% of them required extra treatment to remedy the problem.

In 48% of the cases, the parents of the children were never told what had happened.

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## ■ 40% of new doctors feel unprepared for job

A study in the May 9, 2003 British Medical Journal says that 40% of recent medical school graduates felt that their education had inadequately prepared them for their jobs as doctors.

The study, done at the University of Oxford, surveyed 3446 doctors who graduated from UK medical schools in 1999 and 2000. Although the results varied from school to school, 42% of the students disagreed with the statement: “My experience at medical school prepared me well for the jobs I have undertaken so far.”

Only 36% of the doctors agreed that they were prepared to practice.