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## **Nontraditional therapies becoming good business**

R. Douglas Metz, chief chiropractic officer and vice president of health services for American Specialty Health Plans in San Diego, said information from the study "will assist doctors and policy makers as decisions are made about effective ways to integrate these services into the American health care system."

The conference was sponsored by Stanford University in collaboration with ASHP, which offers complementary medicine through health maintenance organizations, and by Health Net, a network-model HMO based in Woodland Hills, Calif.

ASHP President George DeVries, president of ASHP, said his company "appreciated the opportunity to participate." He added, "Not only did the study reinforce the findings of Dr. David Eisenberg (of Harvard University, author of a pioneering CAM study published in the New England Journal of Medicine in 1993), but it also reflected many of the changes that have occurred in the rapidly growing alternative health care industry."

Haskell noted that a growing number of traditional patient-care organizations, including UCSF Stanford Health Care, now offer complementary services in a dedicated clinic that integrates these services, including insurance reimbursement, with more traditional medicine.

The recent telephone survey queried respondents on their interest in and use of 19 different techniques: acupuncture, herbal medicine, chiropractic, vitamin therapy, massage, naturopathy, homeopathy, chelation, meditation, spiritual health, relaxation, yoga, folk remedies, guided imagery, hypnosis, tai chi, ayurvedic medicine, macrobiotic diet and Chinese medicine.

The study showed that while 55 percent of alternative medicine users had reduced the traditional medical services they used, the rest said their use of CAM had no effect on their visits to traditional physicians. Seventy-three percent of men and 87 percent of women in the study said they have a medical doctor they use most often for routine care.

While this survey, compared with earlier ones, indicated that a larger proportion of Americans are using more CAM services, Alles warned that "there is still some ambiguity in the mind of the public and researchers about what constitutes CAM, so statistics must be viewed extremely cautiously."

For example, he noted that while nearly one-third of the respondents in the new study said they had used vitamin therapy in the past year, it was not clear whether users were taking megadoses to achieve a specific prevention or treatment goal, or were simply taking a daily multivitamin -- a practice often recommended as a part of a conventional health regimen.

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