

To Your Health

Congress Puts Alternative Medical Therapies Under a Microscope

While only \$2 million was allocated to fund OAM activities, "the federal government wouldn't have put \$20 into the project ten years ago... This reflects a change in the federal government's thinking about alternative medical practices," says Dr. Bernard Siegel, M.D., author of *Love, Medicine and Miracles*.

HERBERT P. WEISS

Alternative healing practices come under new federal scrutiny as Congress orders the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) to create an advisory panel to investigate the medical potential that exists in alternative medical practices.

The legislative initiative comes amid recent studies published by the *New England Journal of Medicine*, which reports that about 10 percent of Americans—roughly 25 million people—sought the help of "unconventional" medical practitioners in 1990. The *Washington Post* noted that Americans spent about \$10.3 billion for alternative medical care in 1990, compared to the \$12.8 billion they spent on regular hospital

care bills—though the cost of in-hospital medical care was much higher, insurance companies paid for most of those expenses.

NIH, a federal agency with 16 research institutes, defines alternative medical practices as diagnostic or therapeutic techniques that are presently considered "outside" the mainstream of scientific research. But for millions of Americans, a wide array of unconventional medical therapies—such as Ayurveda medicine, acupuncture, homeopathy, reflexology, visualization, hypnotism, hands-on healing and Chinese herbal remedies—have become part of their regular medical regimen.

Congress Gives NIH a Surprise Gift

Funding for NIH's new plan to study alternative medical practices "was a pure gift to NIH from Congress," claims C. Scott Jones, president of the Vienna, Virginia-based Human Potential Foundation, a nonprofit group that is closely following NIH's new project.

"While they did not ask for the money it nevertheless gives them an important opportunity to be recognized as a voice of reason in a needful transition from a health care system that is failing to a broader one that better serves the health and wellness needs of the nation," Jones says.

Appropriations language written by the Senate Appropriations subcommittee on labor, health, and education, chaired by Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) to accompany the FY 1992 federal budget, directed NIH to spend at least \$2 million to organize the Office of Alternative Medicine (OAM), formerly the Office for the Study of Unconventional Medical Practices.



Retired Iowa Congressman Berkley Bedell has lobbied Capitol Hill for alternative therapies.

Sen. Harkin became interested in studying alternative therapies because of the personal lobbying efforts of former Retired Iowa Congressman Berkley Bedell.

Illness Leads to Search for Cure

Bedell's personal odyssey to find a cure for his serious illness would ultimately have larger implications—congressional prodding of NIH to formally study alternative medical practices.

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Bedell, 71, left Congress in 1986 because of severe lethargy resulting from Lyme's disease. One year later, he was diagnosed as having prostrate cancer.

Traditional medical treatments didn't cure Bedell's Lyme's disease, he tells *Pathways*. But his medical problems were corrected with alternative medical practices, he claims.

While Bedell underwent surgery and radiation for prostate cancer in 1988, there were indications that the malignancy was coming back.

Remission from his second bout with cancer was the result of an injection of a formula containing nitrogen-enriched molecule of camphor, called 714-X, into the lymph node of his groin, he claims.

Bedell learned about this unconventional medical treatment during a trip to Canada to visit Gaston Naessen, a French-born biologist who developed the formula. Naessen claims that the compound enhances the patient's immune system.

Bedell was impressed with the formula 714-X even though Canadian medical authorities claimed that the formula

was "fraudulent" and Naessen's ideas "quackery." He traveled to the Hoxey Clinic in Tijuana, Mexico to purchase the compound. After giving himself treatments, laboratory tests indicated that his cancer was again in remission.

Through Bedell's efforts to tell his friend Senator Harkin of his cure, NIH was given funding to scientifically study the outcomes of alternative medical practices.

Getting Off The Ground

Currently, 20 members including Bedell, a Mescalero Apache medicine man, and a Harvard medical professor, sit on the Office's Ad Hoc Advisory Panel. Paperwork is now being pushed through to establish it as a permanent advisory panel.

There has been a ground swell of support for OAM's efforts. The Office held its two-day kick off session at the NIH campus in suburban Bethesda, Maryland in June 1992. More than 200 people attended the sessions to listen to 85 alternative health care practitioners

speak in general terms about their specific therapies.

Public testimony at the sessions produced more than 500 pages of transcribed comments about alternative healing practices, including Ayurveda medicine, acupuncture, homeopathy, reflexology, visualization, hypnotism, hands-on healing and Chinese herbal remedies.

About 125 scientists, alternative physicians and healers attended an invitational conference in September 1992 to hammer out the Office's goals and objectives to develop research protocols to evaluate alternative healing diagnostic and therapeutic techniques.

The meeting was really an "unusual and historical gathering," says Dr. Beverly Rubik, Ph.D, director of the Center for Frontier Sciences at Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and a member of the Office's Ad Hoc Advisory Panel.

"There was such a variety of people coming from different backgrounds it was outstanding to see the federal government actually fund a conference like this," she says.

OAM is now staffing up to accomplish its Congressional mandate, says director Dr. Joseph Jacobs, M.D., a 46-year-old Yale-trained pediatrician and whose mother was a member of the Mohawk tribe.

With \$2 million included in his Office's

FY 1993 NIH budget, Jacobs is in the process of hiring new staff members who will hold advanced degrees with a knowledge of one or more alternative medical practices. Don't expect OAM's report to Congress to sit on a dusty shelf, Jacobs tells *Pathways*. The report, to be released in Spring 1993, "will really be kind of an action plan for us," he says. It will pull together a lot of the recommendations from the alternative medicine community, he says.

OAM is now surveying other NIH institutes to find out what research activities are currently being conducted on alternative healing therapies, Jacobs notes. This activity "will help us not to reinvent the wheel," he says.

In addition, the Office plans to release a request for a proposal announcing the availability of grant funding and by Oct. 1 awarding about 10 renewable two-year research grants of \$50,000 to \$100,000.

While some people want to see OAM evolve into a full-blown institute, Jacob believes that it is more critical to mainstream alternative therapies in NIH's research community.

"It is important for us to not ghettoize it," he says. "You have to work collaboratively with other institutes—there is no other way to get around that."

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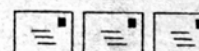
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Wait and See

To be officially sanctioned by the scientific and medical communities, alternative medical practices will have to meet the same strict scientific criteria as conventional medical practices. Alternative therapies are going to challenge the conventional way of clinical testing, Rubik predicts.

"Alternative therapies are often tailored to each individual," she says. "Are they going to look at acupuncture from within its own tradition? Or are they going to squeeze it into a conventional mode of treating specific disease syndromes according to an established protocol?" she asks.

But even with the problems of measuring outcomes, it will be the key to OAM's success. Scientifically-based information will help people make informed and intelligent choices, says Dr. Dean Ornish, M.D., of the University of California, San Francisco.

"Many alternative approaches have value and others don't—some have

value under some circumstances and not in others," Ornish says.

OAM's role will be to "find out what works, for whom, and to what degree and under what circumstances," he says.

Medical groups are generally supportive but some express skepticism about whether anything meaningful will come out of NIH's efforts to study alternative healing therapies especially with limited funding.

"NIH won't be able to do too many studies with a funding level of only \$2 million," says Roy Schwarz, senior vice president for medical education and science at the American Medical Association.

"There are so many alleged alternative therapies we will never have the money to investigate them all," Schwarz says. To succeed, "NIH must prioritize and look at the unconventional medical therapies that seem to have the most promise."

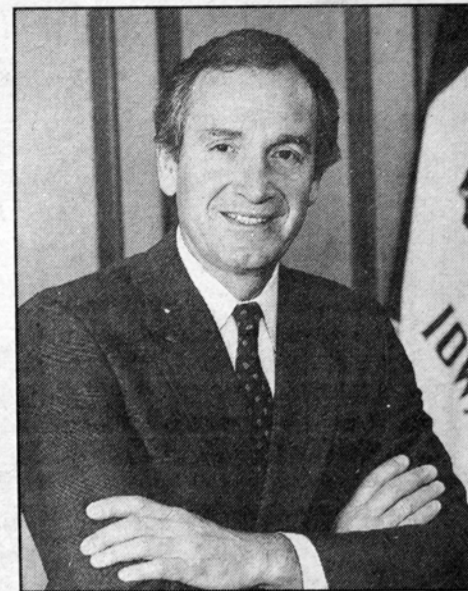
But people in the alternative healing community see great things ahead and

even more acceptance of alternative medical practices by the medical community in the future, even with only a couple of million dollars in OAM's budget.

While only \$2 million was allocated to fund OAM activities, "the federal government wouldn't have put \$20 into the project ten years ago," says Dr. Bernard Siegel, M.D., author of the best-selling book, *Love, Medicine and Miracles*. "This reflects a change in the federal government's thinking about alternative medical practices," he notes.

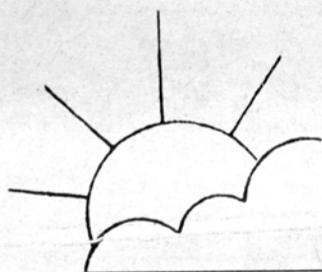
"Real change doesn't often happen with only a pile of clinical data," Rubik says. "But it can happen when real people like Bedell share their convictions and take responsibility to make changes," she says.

Herbert P. Weiss is a freelance writer in Providence, RI, who covers health care issues. He can be reached at (401) 351-9519.



Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) chairs the Senate subcommittee on labor, health, and education that directed NIH to spend at least \$2 million to study alternative therapies.

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ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE AT THE CROSSROADS

The Challenge and the Opportunity

Government Holistic Health Conference Raises Questions, Offers Possible Solutions

DANIEL REDWOOD, D.C.

As the nation's health reform debate takes center stage, proponents of holistic healing methods face a situation fraught with challenge and opportunity. There is widespread agreement in America that something is radically wrong with our health care system, but no broad consensus has yet emerged as to how to cure the ailment. Most public policy discussions have focused intently on the economics of reform, but a far more fundamental issue is at stake: What kind of health care system is likely to make us a truly healthy society in the long run?

To address this question, three federal government agencies and the National Wellness Coalition jointly convened a landmark conference, "Alternative Medicine, Wellness and Health Care Reform: Preparing for a Sustainable Future." The National Institutes of Health Office of Alternative Medicine, the National Museum of Health and Medicine, the United States Botanic Garden, and the Wellness Coalition invited leading scientists, educators, policy makers, and practitioners of alternative therapies to the conference, which was held May 20-23 at the National Museum of Health and Medicine in Washington, D.C. Four event-filled days offered an unprecedented wide-angle view of the scope and depth of the alternative movement.

A Broad Consensus for Change

Keynote Marilyn Ferguson, author of *The Aquarian Conspiracy: Personal and Social Transformation in Our Time*, set

the tone for the gathering, declaring that we are now at a crucial moment in time. "As individuals, we have to be pushed into a corner before we change," she told the overflow opening-day crowd, "and the same thing is true at the collective level."

Because the established medical system has so few answers for the major diseases of our time, and so many of its well-worn ways are now widely perceived to be inadequate or even counterproductive, a broad consensus for change exists. Invoking an image from traditional Chinese medicine,

Ferguson compared the current state of flux to "an energetic shift in the meridians of the body politic."

"Everyone has issues with health," she explained, noting that this near-universality of health problems creates an extraordinarily large constituency not only for health reform, but for deep transformation in the way people view health and disease. Ferguson wrote in *The Aquarian Conspiracy* in 1980 that health is the area of society where the greatest paradigm shift has taken place. In her keynote address, she avowed that this is still the case.

The depth of the current crisis means that ideas which once seemed unrealistically utopian may now offer the only practical solutions. As people empower themselves to take control of their own health, and as society redefines the ways professional health care is provided, Ferguson said, "the old idealism is becoming the new common sense."

Self-care through nutrition, exercise, relaxation techniques and other natural methods is an essential component of the emerging holistic paradigm. This focus on wellness, combined with traditional healing arts like acupuncture, chiropractic and

herbal medicine, provides a sensible, preventive low-tech alternative to over-reliance on end-game high-tech disease care. Ferguson believes that cooperative efforts to create a holistic, sustainable health care system in America have a better chance of success now than ever before.

A Large and Growing Movement

Americans are flocking to alternative practitioners by the millions. David Eisenberg's study, published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in January 1993, confirmed this

continued on next page →

New Office of Alternative Medicine Juggles a Variety of Projects

HERBERT P. WEISS

With most of its professional staff hired, the Office of Alternative Medicine, headquartered at the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH), continues to work on its ambitious 1993 agenda.

Now that the submission deadline is passed, NIH staffers begin to sift thru research grant applications to identify which alternative medicine practice studies should receive federal funding.

OAM deluged with grant applications

While NIH's Office of Alternative Medicine (OAM) received more than 800 letters of intent to receive submission guidelines, 500 formal applications were submitted by alternative health and mainstream medical practitioners, director Dr. Joseph Jacobs, M.D., OAM's director, tells *Pathways*. The applications were in response to a request for applications issued on March 26, 1993 announcing the availability of grant funding. By Oct. 1, OAM plans to award about 20 research grants up to \$30,000 to evaluate alternative medical practice outcomes.

NIH's Division of Research Grants will examine the applications via technical panels, scoring

each application for technical merits, Jacobs says, noting that alternative health practitioners will serve on each panel. Although the division will make initial funding recommendations, look for the OAM staff and its 25 member program advisory committee to pick the finalists, he tells us.

OAM staff juggles a variety of projects

The Office is involved in a wide array of projects, (e.g., conference planning, drafting a report, and preparing testimony for a Senate hearing.

The Office has scheduled a technology assessment conference for next winter in Bethesda, Maryland. "We need to bring in outside methodology experts to help guide us," Jacobs says, noting that conference findings will provide technical information on study design to researchers seeking fiscal 1994 funding for research studies.

Jacobs notes that his staff are also putting the final touches to a draft report detailing the recommendations of an invitational conference held in September 1992 in Chantilly, Virginia. The final report, scheduled for release in fall 1993, identifies OAM's goals and objectives to develop research protocols to evaluate alternative healing diagnostic and therapeutic techniques.

"We will closely watch how OAM edits its final report of more than 500 pages generated from various working groups formed at the invitational conference," says Dr. Scott Jones, president of the Falls Church, Virginia-based Human Potential Foundation. "There are powerful and controversial words in these drafts that need to be put before the public. If the words are edited out, there will be a need for an unexpurgated edition with comments," he tells us.

Capitol Hill supportive of alternative medicine

Currently, both the White House and Congress are closely monitoring OAM's efforts to evaluate alternative medical therapy outcomes, Jacobs observes. While President Clinton's Task Force on Health Care Reform solicited comments from mainstream medical and health care groups about their concerns, its members also wanted to hear about OAM's activities, he notes. Jacobs was invited by Task Force last April to address alternative medical therapies fits into health care reform.

Even the Senate Appropriations subcommittee on labor, health, and education, chaired by Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa), has scheduled a June 24 hearing to highlight the benefits of alternative medical practices along with exercising its

congressional oversight responsibilities on OAM's activities.

"Alternative medical practitioners are urging the Senate panel to address interagency turf battles that might erupt from OAM's new research initiatives," Jones says. He has written to Sen. Harkin asking that all OAM granted research be protected from Federal Drug Administration action (FDA) as long as the approved research protocols are followed.

OAM research studies will allow FDA to learn about competent researchers working at the edge of new medical methodologies and technologies, Jones predicts. Instead of responding to frequently fear based charges from a status quo medical constituency, the agency can become an active partner of needed changes, he says.

"There are a lot of legitimate alternative medical practices that deserve to become part of mainstream medicine," notes Jodie Silverman, spokeswoman for Sen. Harkin. "The Senator wants to ensure that the OAM is taking a serious look at some of the alternative therapies," she says. She notes that the hearing will lend legitimacy to OAM's efforts.

Herbert P. Weiss is a freelance writer in Providence, RI, who covers alternative health care issues. He can be reached at (401) 351-9519.

Health Care Providers More Accepting of Alternative Therapies

BY HERBERT P. WEISS

While Congress debates health care reform, a quiet revolution is taking place in the nation's health care delivery system. With the federal government's new role in funding outcome research studies on alternative medical therapies, insurance payors, medical schools and hospitals are beginning to embrace alternative medical therapies.

Payors Warming Up to Unconventional Treatments

With the exception of chiropractic care, medical insurance policies traditionally have denied coverage of alternative medical therapies. However, outcome research studies showing the effectiveness of alternative medical therapies, combined with public demand for coverage, are forcing insurance companies to take notice.

Mutual of Omaha, the nation's largest provider of health insurance, recently announced plans to reimburse patients for a nontraditional medical treatment

program to reduce heart disease. The "reverse program" was developed by Dean Ornish, M.D., of the University of California, at San Francisco, who prescribes lifestyle changes to treat heart disease. Ornish's program combines a low-fat diet with moderate exercise and support groups to reduce heart disease. His program would cost insurance carriers per person about \$3,500 a year, about one-tenth the price of coronary-bypass surgery.

In San Francisco Bay area, a family-operated insurance company is offering one of the most comprehensive alternative health care coverage packages in the nation. Western Life Insurance Company, a \$60 million insurer with 300,000 clients, will cover guided imagery, chiropractic, acupuncture, biofeedback, naturopathy, homeopathy, medicinal herbs and hypnotherapy. The comprehensive package combines traditional major medical coverage with alternative therapy care at a competitive price.

While the mid-size insurance company currently offers the comprehensive coverage and an alternative care-only supplemental package in Utah,

Colorado, New Mexico, California and Arizona, it plans to expand its market by selling its products in five other western states in the Spring 1994.

Alternative Therapies: 101

Medical school curriculum is being rewritten to incorporate the expanding body of knowledge on alternative therapies. Locally, the Center for Mind-Body Medicine teaches medical students in the Departments of Psychiatry and Family Medicine at Georgetown University School of Medicine about mind-body approaches for treating patients. Established in 1991, the medical school-based nonprofit center, headed by James S. Gordon, M.D., sponsors both required and elective medical school courses on an array of healing topics. In addition, the Center offers support groups to teach self-relaxation techniques to medical students.

The Center's outreach programs teach health care practitioners and others to take better care of themselves psychologically, physically and spiritually. Educational and therapeutic support groups are available to teach people with life threatening chronic illnesses (e.g.,

cancer, heart disease and AIDS) to heal themselves by integrating mind-body concepts.

At the same time, in a significant departure from its 226-year history of traditional medical education, the College of Physicians and Surgeons at Columbia University has recently joined with The Richard and Hinda Rosenthal Foundation to establish a center for alternative medicine.

The Richard and Hinda Rosenthal Center for Alternative/Complementary Medicine was established in December 1993 by a start-up grant of \$750,000 over five years from the Richard and Hinda Rosenthal Foundation. Among its first initiatives, the center is co-sponsoring a new elective course on alternative/complementary medicine for second-year medical students.

The center will be based in Columbia's Department of Rehabilitation Medicine, which already uses biofeedback, massage, physical manipulation and nutrition as a part of its conventional medical practice. When additional funding is required, the center will conduct clinical research to evaluate various alternative therapies.

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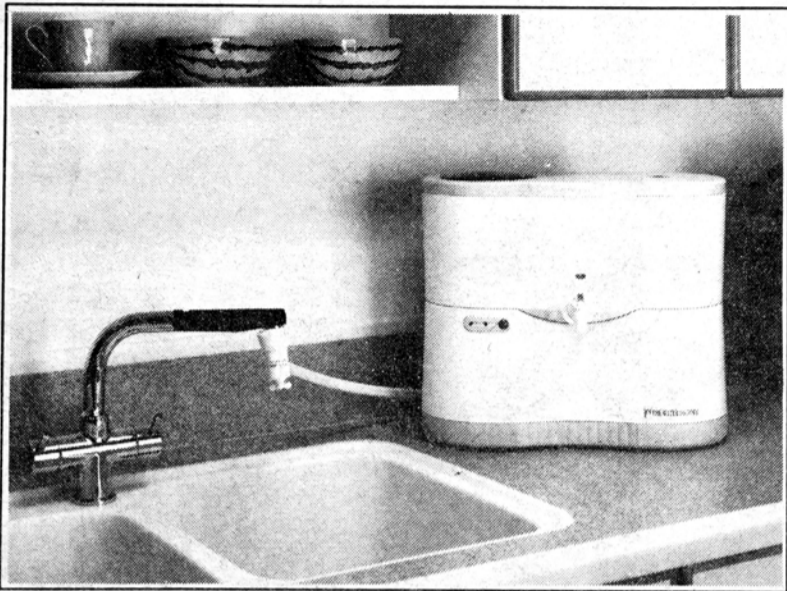
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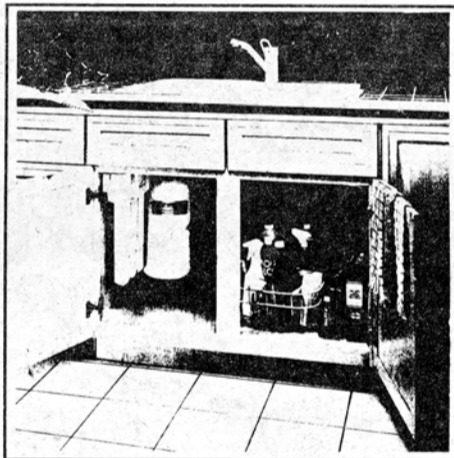
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HEALTHWATCH

Health Care Providers More Accepting of Alternative Therapies

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Meeting the Public's Demand

A growing number of hospitals are offering holistic care along with typical medical care and rehabilitative services.

Braintree Hospital, the largest independent provider of comprehensive medical rehabilitation services based in Massachusetts, recently established a Center for Alternative Therapies. The center provides over 25 different types of alternative therapies (e.g. body therapies and energy-based therapies) in nine treatment rooms. Conference and group space allow staff to present seminars on holistic topics and to teach yoga, stretching groups, personal training and tai chi.

On the West Coast, clinical research, education and treatments using holistic principles are components of a new program offered by Sharp Healthcare's new Institute for Human Potential and Mind/Body Medicine. The San Diego-based institute, headed by Deepak Chopra, M.D., one of the world recognized lead-

ers in mind-body medicine, is expected to open in late August.

Institute staff will teach professionals and interested consumers how to harness the mind to promote optimum health. The institute use meditation, massage and nutritional counseling in conjunction with traditional medical techniques.

In the coming years, credible outcome research studies will mainstream successful alternative medical therapies resulting in broader insurance coverage. Medical school curriculum will change to reflect this growing knowledge base. Hospitals will integrate new therapies with traditional medical treatments. These low-tech therapies will improve quality of health care by allowing medical staff to treat both the mind, body and spirit.

Herbert P. Weiss is a Rhode Island based writer who covers health care issues. He can be reached at 401/351-9519.