

## Blue Shield of California Offers Chiropractic to Its Members

Editorial Staff

SAN FRANCISCO, California -- Blue Shield of California has announced a program called Lifepath, the first comprehensive credentialed network of "alternative" practitioners (chiropractic, acupuncture, message therapy) for its members.

The Lifepath program will be added to all standard Blue Shield of California underwritten health plans (at no additional premium cost) beginning Jan. 1, 1998. Members will choose the Lifepath services and practitioners they want to access from the network. No physician referral is required, and members can use the Lifepath program as often as they like. No claim forms are required and discounts average 25 percent or more off the practitioner's standard fees.

The chiropractic portion of the network is being screened and will be monitored by American Specialty Networks.

Blue Shield, by all indications, has taken to heart the 1993 landmark study on alternative medicine published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*,<sup>1</sup> which found that as many as one out of three Americans use alternative health services, with even higher usage in the Western United States. The study noted that in 1990, expenditures associated with the use of "unconventional" therapies amounted to \$13.7 billion, \$10.3 billion of which was paid out of pocket.

Wayne Moon, chairman and chief executive officer of Blue Shield of California, indicated the move was made because their members want a "broader range of qualified professional services." Noting that "many people take advantage of their health plan only when they are sick," Mr. Moon said the "new feature gives members a reason to appreciate their plan even when they are healthy."

"We are committed to traditional medicine backed by rigorous science," said Al Martin, MD, senior vice president and medical director for Blue Shield of California, "but we also want to support members who are using a broad range of preventive services and wellness therapies that may complement traditional health care."

Blue Shield will also offer an HMO policy option rider that will allow employers to cover a fixed number of acupuncture visits for an additional premium. The HMO acupuncture rider also will be available starting January 1, 1998.

Blue Shield of California (based in San Francisco) is a not-for-profit health plan with more than 1.6 million members, and more than \$1.8 billion in annual revenues. Blue Shield of California asserts it is California's fastest growing "access plus HMO," and has the largest statewide PPO physician network.

Blue Shield recently signed a definitive agreement with UniHealth to acquire CareAmerica Health Plan and CareAmerica Life Insurance Company, an acquisition that will add 265,000 new HMO members to Blue Shield's enrollment.

## *Reference*

1. Eisenberg D, et al. Unconventional medicine in the United States. Prevalence, costs, and patterns of use. *New Eng J Med*, 1993;328:246-52.

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