

More Opportunities for Chiropractic

Donald M. Petersen Jr., BS, HCD(hc), FICC(h), Publisher

A survey by Thomson Medstat has found that "more than 37 percent of U.S. households" used some form of "alternative medicine" (sorry, I prefer the term "alternative care") in the previous 12 months.¹ This rate compares favorably with other reports that have placed the annual usage at between 35 percent and 42 percent, depending on which types of care were studied.^{2,3} This survey is unique in that it includes more than just the percentage of households that utilize alternative care. The authors looked at who is driving the demand and why. More than 23,000 U.S. adults were surveyed over the first half of 2006. Their responses reveal trends that should have some positive impact on political decision-makers.

Who Uses It: Much of the demand for alternative health over the past year is being driven by those that are well-educated and earn large incomes: Nearly 50 percent (49.9%) of all households earning \$100,000 or more used alternative care, as did 49.6 percent of those with postgraduate degrees. These are exciting findings in that many of these individuals are likely to be decision-makers or influencers of one kind or another.

The ethnic breakdown of alternative care users is fairly balanced, with 47.4 percent of "mixed race" leading the way. At the other end of the spectrum, only 26.6 percent of African Americans utilized alternative care. The age ranges of users also are generally balanced. The smallest group is the over-age-65 crowd, with 28.3 percent utilization.

Why They Are Using It: The public's understanding of the philosophy of alternative health is changing. This survey found that over 40 percent of those who used alternative care did so primarily for their "general wellness," while another 10.2 percent did so primarily "to supplement traditional care." Of those who were specifically illness-focused, nearly 33 percent utilized alternative care to "treat an illness" and 9.9 percent did so to "prevent an illness." Irritable bowel was the most common specific illness for which users sought alternative care (46.6 percent), followed by lower back pain, skin problems, heartburn, osteoporosis, cancer, incontinence, benign prostate enlargement, and diabetes.

In their conclusion, the authors noted that "the most highly educated and well-paid Americans continue to drive the growth of the alternative medicine movement." For those who can afford any form of health care and have the best ability to understand the choices, half choose alternatives to traditional medical care. That says something.

Considering these facts, the chiropractic profession should take a hard look at issues of access and education. What do we need to do to reach the less educated about what chiropractic has to offer, and how do we ensure they get the access and insurance coverage they need? If we answer these questions adequately over the next 10 years, we can expect to see significant movement in these numbers.

References

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DMP Jr.

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