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Oxford Health Plans to Offer Network of Alternative Providers

By Editorial Staff

NORWALK, Conn., /PRNewswire/ -- Beginning January 1, 1997, Oxford Health Plans, Inc. will offer an alternative medicine program to many of its members through a credentialed network of top-quality providers, announced Stephen F. Wiggins, chairman and chief executive officer. Oxford was recently chosen as the number one health plan for overall customer satisfaction in New York City. Oxford asserts it will be the first major health plan in the country to offer an alternative medicine program through a credentialed network.

Oxford's alternative medicine network is comprised of chiropractors, acupuncturists, massage therapists, registered dietitians, clinical nutritionists, yoga instructors and, in Connecticut, naturopathic physicians. A primary care physician referral is not required, but members must call Oxford for a visit number before accessing these providers.

Oxford's alternative medicine program will include four components: a large credentialed network of alternative medicine providers; a benefit plan which includes coverage for alternative medicine services that can be purchased as a supplement to regular Oxford coverage; a mail order service for purchasing vitamins, remedies and alternative medicine products; and an information service to help Oxford members understand the alternative strategies used for various diseases and conditions.

"We have long believed that alternative therapies can complement traditional medicine and improve the health and healing of our members," Wiggins said. "Our members have made it clear that they would welcome the choice of selecting one or both styles of medicine based upon their needs and personal views. In response to this, we are providing access to the best practitioners in all fields of medicine."

Hassan Rifaat, M.D., Oxford's manager of alternative medicine added: "Our move into alternative medicine is based on both our own philosophies and on a recognition of what our members want. In a recent survey, one in three Oxford members reported visiting an alternative medicine provider in the past two years."

Similarly, a recent study of family practitioners by researchers at the State University of New York at Syracuse (published in the March 1995 issue of *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine*), revealed that more than 50 percent of those doctors would recommend their patients to some type of alternative medicine provider.

To create the alternative program, Oxford invited chiropractors, acupuncturists and naturopaths to establish the quality standards required for admission into the network. To qualify, fee providers must: be licensed in the state in which they practice; a graduate of a fully accredited college; demonstrate two years of continuous clinical experience; pursue continuing education credits; and carry proper malpractice insurance.

"Oxford expects to credential between 500 and 1,000 network providers by January 1, 1997 and 2,000 by the end of 1997," Rifaat said. Recredentialing occurs every two years and providers are subject to site inspections upon request from Oxford.

Also in 1997, Oxford will be offering an alternative rider, which will allow commercial groups in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut to purchase insured coverage for certain alternative providers. Under the rider, members will pay only a co-pay to visit chiropractors.

Oxford's alternative medicine program will also offer additional products and services, such as educational seminars, books and tapes, and special rates on vitamins and supplements.

"The addition of an alternative medicine program is just one step in a series of new product and service offerings Oxford members can expect in the next 12 months," Wiggins said. "In response to member expectations and demands, we are continually seeking ways to promote healing and a more healthful lifestyle. This program is in direct response to where health conscious consumers are already headed on their own."



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