

By John Benzaquen

Alternative

(Courtesy Realman Institute)

medicine:

The health funds get into the act

If anyone needed proof that the Israeli health funds are adapting to a free market environment, just look at the set-up of the four organizations. Clalit, Maccabi, Meuhedet and Leumi are all offering alternative medicine services.

Why is this proof of their adaptability to market forces or public demand? It is because in some conservative medical circles – and the health funds are conservative bodies – alternative medicine has always been viewed as some kind of black magic.

But at today alternative medicine is in vogue. The demand for what one can call non-conventional medicine is rising sharply, and the health funds are getting into the act. These doctors, who deserve claiming that there is no scientific proof that that morbo kuzho works are told to keep quiet because if they do not offer alternative medicine services, others will. And that would result

in a loss of clients.

And with good reason. Today, the Western world is in the grip of what can be termed "Eastern ho" fever. The satisfied saturated Westerner is looking for novel experiences, especially in medical care. What is called alternative medicine is taking the world by storm. If one were to measure by using Eastern style medicine with Western style medicine, the Eastern version would win hands down.

Sally Friedman, president of the Rodman College, which trains practitioners in alternative medical practices, objects to the term "alternative."

"I object to the word 'alternative medicine' because it implies something out of the ordinary, not in the natural flow of things, not scientific. Eastern medicine is not an alternative medicine because it has been around and curing people for thousands of years, while modern Western medicine is very new by comparison. It is not an

alternative to conventional medicine; it is a different concept altogether."

Indeed, the concepts are completely different.

Alt. Friedman, head of the Department of Integrative Medicine at the Asaf Haroel Medical Center, says, "The Eastern system of medicine, or alternative if you will, is completely natural. It believes that the human body, like the bodies of all living things, have internal curative properties. Its main function is to induce the human body to cure itself by provocative means that may trigger the curing process or by enhancing and increasing the body's natural curing mechanism."

He adds, "If there is need for outside help, they make use of it. But getting outside help to effect a cure as, for example surgery, is a totally last resort because it is based on making use of the curative mechanism of the body. Eastern medicine practitioners believe that modern medicine,

which is based on drugs, has diminished the internal curative mechanism of the body. Eastern medicine is also holistic. It treats the whole. I believe in integrative medicine. Both the Western and Eastern systems have many good points. I believe in making use of the best in each of them according to the needs of the particular patient. Most illnesses are symptoms of some internal disorder and instead of treating the result alone, Eastern medicine treats the cause. It gets to the root of the problem."

Be that as it may, alternative, natural, ancient or Eastern, it is catching up. Even the Health Ministry, the bastion of the entrenched medical establishment, understands that times change and one must swim with the current.

The health funds have set up impressive alternative organizations. Clalit, for example, the largest health fund, with some 40% of total membership, is largest supplier of alternative medical treatments in the country. It is called Clalit Refua Mashluma (Clalit Alternative Medicine). It has 55 clinics around the country, offering a wide variety of treatments. At Clalit, a qualified conventional MD who also has some training in alternative medicine does the diagnosis and decides what treatment is required.

Dr. Mori Levy, the medical director of Clalit Alternative Medicine, explains that: "We offer, among other things, acupuncture, the treatment with Chinese needles, the use of healing herbs; homeopathy, which means adapting treatment to the special characteristics of the person and not only the particular malady; naturopathy, which strengthens the natural curing characteristics of the body; and various massages. Our organization has existed for 17 years, and the number of patients we treat is growing daily. Most of these are patients who have despaired of being cured by conventional means."

the second-largest health fund in the country, offers its services through an organization called Maccabi [Teva](#) (Maccabi Natural).

Dr. Adi Zwang, the organization's medical director, says, "Those who come to us do so because they have some medical problem. But in the last two years, more and more are coming not because of some ailment but because they believe that certain treatments will upgrade their quality of life."

Zwang adds that most people come to be treated for problems that cause them pain.

Maccabi offers various types of treatment besides the regular alternative treatments. It also offers treatment by hypnosis and the Alexander Technique, which is beneficial to the spine. ■



(Courtesy Realman Institute)

