Annual CAM Spending in U.S. Tops \$33 Billion

BY HEIDI SPLETE

pproximately 38% of American adults use some type of complementary and alternative medicine, and they spent nearly \$34 billion on CAM products and practitioners over the past 12 months, based on data from the 2007 National Health Interview Survey.

Researchers reviewed interviews with 23,393 adults aged 18 and older that were included in the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS). The survey is conducted annually by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Lead author Richard L. Nahin, Ph.D., is acting director of the division of extramural research at the National Institutes of Health's National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine.

Overall, approximately 65% (\$22 billion) of American adults' spending on CAM went toward self-care, while approximately 35% (\$11.9 billion) was spent on visits to CAM practitioners, Dr. Nahin and colleagues reported.

Of the money spent on self-care, nearly 44% (\$14.8 billion) went to nonvitamin, nonmineral natural products. Another \$4.1 billion were spent on classes such as yoga and tai chi; \$2.9 billion, on homeopathic medicine; and \$200 million, on relaxation techniques.

The money spent on CAM products was approximately one-third of the \$47.6 billion American adults spent on pharmaceutical drugs in 2007, the researchers noted.

The money spent on CAM provider visits was approximately one-quarter of

INDEX OF ADVERTISERS

Citracal	23
Bayer HealthCare Pharmaceuticals Inc. Mirena Angeliq Yaz	5-6 39-40 47-48
BD Diagnostics FocalPoint	27
Duramed Pharmaceuticals, Inc. (a subsidiary of Barr Pharmaceuticals) ParaGard	28a-28b
Fujirebio Diagnostics, Inc. HE4	15
GlaxoSmithKline Corporate	3
Graceway Pharmaceuticals, LLC Aldara	17-18
Eli Lilly and Company Evista	30-33
National Foundation for Infectious Diseases Childhood Influenza Immunization Coalition	8a-8b
Novo Nordisk Inc. Vagifem	7-8
Pfizer Inc. Toviaz	21-22
Proctor & Gamble Pharmaceuticals Actonel	10-13
Schering Plough HealthCare Products, Inc. MiraLAX	35
Union Swiss Bio-Oil	37
Watson Pharma. Inc.	

24a-24d

Gelnique

the \$49.6 billion spent on conventional physician services.

Although the overall number of visits to CAM providers (except for acupuncturists) decreased in 2007, compared with a decade earlier, "at least 20% of persons visiting practitioners of acupuncture, homeopathy, naturopathy, massage, and hypnosis therapy paid \$75 or more per visit," the researchers wrote.

The results were limited by the re-

liance on self-reports from the survey respondents, and by estimates of each respondent's annual CAM spending based on the most recent purchase, which may not have been typical of a respondent's CAM use, the researchers said.

But the NHIS data show that U.S. adults make more than 300 million visits to CAM providers and spend billions of dollars on CAM annually.

"These expenditures, although a small

fraction of total health care spending in the United States, constitute a substantial part of out-of-pocket health care costs and are comparable to out-of-pocket costs for conventional physician services and prescription drug use," the researchers said.

47

View the complete report online at the CDC's Web site at www.cdc.gov/NCHS /data/nhsr/nhsr018.pdf.



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