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Market Trends

Kaiser Permanente Offers 'Behavior Change' Programs for Members With Specialty Firm

Kaiser Permanente, the nation's largest nonprofit health plan, has selected **HealthMedia Inc.** to provide its plan members with behavior change programs designed to help them improve their health, HealthMedia said July 29.

The programs, which are available through Kaiser's Web site (<http://www.kaiserpermanente.org>), use behavior-change science "to achieve high impact and produce proven outcomes in areas like weight management, nutrition, smoking cessation, and stress management," HealthMedia said in a release. Kaiser is offering the behavior change programs to 8.2 million members, HealthMedia said.

Kaiser's decision was based on the positive results of a recent clinical trial undertaken by Kaiser and HealthMedia, the release said. Kate Christensen, medical director for Kaiser Permanente's Internet Services Group, said, "The results that we have achieved with behavior change programs over the past two years have shown high efficacy, improved health status, reduced utilization, and overall plan satisfaction."

HealthMedia's programs also are offered by another health plan, Highmark Inc., free of charge to the plan's 4.3 million members.

Ann Arbor, Mich.-based HealthMedia was founded in 1998. The company said it has created programs for conditions and issues such as diabetes, hypertension, arthritis, back pain, smoking cessation, and weight management.

Cognitive Behavioral Program. Vic Strecher, founder of HealthMedia and the company's chief science officer, told BNA July 30 that the company will offer cognitive behavioral programs for issues such as weight, stress, and smoking to Kaiser members through Kaiser's Web site.

Under the program, a Kaiser member will log on to the Web site and answer a set of questions about his/her perceptions regarding food or smoking, for example. Then, the computer generates a program to address the barriers and help the user. A user can use the program as many times as he or she wants, but the number of times visited does not have a strong correlation to success, Strecher said.

In the area of diet, Strecher said that of the 8.2 million Kaiser members, some 1.5 million are obese, and this segment is costing the health plan an extra \$3 billion every year. Based on a randomized trial run with Kaiser members, the HealthMedia program resulted in an average (mean) weight loss of 9 pounds over 12 months, and a reduction of 1.1 outpatient visits versus the control group, Strecher added.

In addition to his role at the company, Strecher is a behavioral scientist at the University of Michigan School of Public Health.