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Americans Likely to Gain Access to the Best of Alternative and Conventional Medicine

ALBUQUERQUE, NM. May 27, 2003. An upstart outfit in New Mexico rallied thousands of government and private health plans, provider organizations and practitioners in support of a federally-authorized market trial that could give millions of Americans insurance coverage for the best of alternative and conventional medicine.

The demonstration program authorizes Alternative Link to evaluate the cost-benefits of ABC codes in commercial use. ABC codes are new business tools that could bring to the healthcare industry the same consumer orientation and operating efficiencies that exist in the grocery industry. The codes support research, management and commerce in the fields of alternative medicine, nursing and other forms of integrative healthcare. They fill gaps in older medical code sets that, for years, have focused on care delivered by conventional physicians. By doing so, ABC codes support cost-effectiveness comparisons between conventional, complementary and alternative medicine. Such comparisons—which often lead to changes in insurance coverage and reimbursement policies—were difficult when the American Medical Association (AMA) had what some call a “statutory monopoly” on coding.

Synthia Molina, CEO of Alternative Link, explains. “Imagine if an American Food Association controlled universal product codes or bar codes on food products. All that association would need to do to keep international foods off the shelves would be to withhold UPCs for those products. The resulting supply chain inefficiencies would be so great that no grocer could afford to stock international foods—even if those were the foods Americans preferred at times.”

“That’s exactly what has happened in healthcare,” she continues. “Wherever the AMA has failed to issue codes for alternative medicine, nursing or other forms of integrative healthcare, Americans have found those approaches to care largely excluded from their covered health insurance benefits. This limits consumer choice and drives up prices on conventional approaches to care.”

ABC codes—the brainchild of Melinna Giannini, a former health benefits broker and Alternative Link’s Founder and President—already characterize some 4,000 healthcare services and supplies delivered primarily by wellness-oriented healthcare practitioners. Among these are acupuncturists, bodyworkers, chiropractors, holistic physicians, homeopaths, ethnic and minority healthcare professionals, massage therapists, midwives, naturopaths, nurses, oriental medicine practitioners, osteopaths, somatic educators and spiritual healers. Forthcoming codes will reflect care delivered by nutritionists, holistic dentists, mental health professionals, occupational therapists, pharmacists, physical therapists and others.

Alternative Link (www.alternativelink.com) delivers information products and consulting services that help health-promoting organizations and practitioners finance, administer and deliver cost-effective care that improves individual health, industry efficiencies and socioeconomic development. The Company develops codes in collaboration with a non-profit organization, The Foundation for Integrative Healthcare (FIHC). FIHC (www.fihc.org) manages information on the characteristics and outcomes of care to help health-promoting organizations and practitioners make rational decisions that improve individual health, industry efficiencies and socioeconomic development.