

Kaiser Will Publish Treatment Guidelines

Kaiser Permanente says it will begin publishing on its Web site its internal guidelines for the treatment of hundreds of diseases and conditions. Patients will be able to use the information to assess the treatment they are receiving, whether from Kaiser or from other organizations or individual physicians.

Kaiser will also publish information about its doctors' pay, including data about financial incentives. Kaiser's action is part of a settlement of two consumer lawsuits. Consumer advocates are hoping that Kaiser's decision will push other health care organizations to publish their treatment guidelines and be more forthcoming about the financial rewards they offer their physicians. Kaiser is the nation's largest nonprofit health maintenance organization and is generally regarded as having a rigorous process for developing treatment guidelines. Giving consumers the opportunity to compare the treatment they are receiving with that recommended by Kaiser is a major step forward, consumer advocates said. Kaiser's action conforms to the "evidence-based" approach recommended by the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences -- basing medical practice on evidence gained from the treatment of thousands of patients and sharing that evidence with the general public. Though numerous agencies and organizations develop treatment guidelines, few are available to the general public. The U.S. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality operates a Web site called the National Guidelines Clearinghouse. It publishes treatment guidelines that various medical groups have agreed upon. Co-sponsors are the American Medical Association and the American Association of Health Plans, a managed care trade group. The lawsuits against Kaiser accused it of false advertising. The plaintiffs said Kaiser's ads wrongly claimed that their doctors' decisions on patient care were based only on medical criteria decided by doctors. Referred from: (<http://www.consumeraffairs.com>)