

More hospitals offering alternative therapy services

By Duke Helfand, Los Angeles Times

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Growing numbers of U.S. hospitals, responding to patient demand, are integrating acupuncture, massage therapy and other alternative services into their conventional medical care, a new national survey shows.

Forty-two percent of hospitals in the survey said they offer one or more alternative therapies, including meditation, relaxation training, homeopathy and chiropractic care.

That's up from 37% of hospitals that said they offered such medical services in 2007.

The alternative options are provided mostly in outpatient settings and come primarily in response to patient requests.

"Hospitals have long known that what they do to treat and heal involves more than just medications and procedures," said Nancy Foster, vice president for quality and patient safety at the American Hospital Assn. "It is about using all of the art and science of medicine to restore the patient as fully as possible."

The report is based on responses from 714 hospitals nationwide, or about 12% of nearly 6,000 facilities that were mailed surveys last year.

It was written by the Health Forum, a subsidiary of the national hospital association, and the Samueli Institute, a nonprofit research organization that investigates the role of "healing" practices in medical care. The Alexandria, Va., institute was founded by Henry Samueli, co-founder of Irvine-based Broadcom Corp., and his wife, Susan.

Among the survey's findings: 65% of hospitals said they offer alternative therapies for pain management. Massage therapy in particular is given to cancer patients to help alleviate pain and stress.

"Today's patients have better access to health information and are demanding more personalized care," said Sita Ananth, one of the study's authors and director of knowledge services for the Samueli Institute. "The survey results reinforce the fact that patients want the best that both conventional and alternative medicine can offer."