
Sanders wants to regulate HMOs

MONTPELIER (AP) — Rep. Bernard Sanders says health maintenance organizations are focusing too much on their bottom lines rather on patient care, so he is introducing a bill aimed at reforming their policies.

Sanders described his proposal at a news conference on Monday and said he would formally introduce it later this week.

Dubbed the "Hippocratic Oath and Patient Protection Act," Sanders said the bill

would address problems at HMOs that he said were threatening the relationships between physicians and their patients.

"Many HMOs use what are essentially 'fee-for-denying-service' systems, which pay doctors for denying care and penalize them for providing it," he said. "This places doctors in very difficult situations, as they are asked to base their decisions on criteria that is contrary to what they were taught and swore

to uphold."

One of the biggest problems with the new managed care networks — which tightly control patients' access to their groups of doctors, nurses, hospitals and other health-care providers — is secrecy, he said.

"You would have to be patently insane to sign on with an HMO who you know is going to pay your doctor not to treat you," Sanders said. "So, some insurance companies are taking

steps to make sure you don't know what they are doing."

The companies maintain incentive plans that work to deny patients access to care, the Vermont independent said.

He also decried another trend in the industry. Many HMOs are implementing gag rules in their contracts with doctors, which tell the physicians what they can and cannot tell their patients, he said.
