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**SANDERS SAYS HMOs NEED TO FOCUS ON SAVING LIVES
INSTEAD OF SAVING DOLLARS: SAYS LEGISLATION WILL PREVENT
DISTURBING TRENDS IN MANAGED CARE**

Rep. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., today announced he will be introducing legislation this week which will address disturbing trends in managed care. Noting that many HMOs have focused on their bottom line, Sanders said his legislation would instead focus on the patient's best interests.

Sanders, at a Montpelier press conference, said his legislation, the "Hippocratic Oath and Patient Protection Act" is designed to address serious problems in HMOs that threaten the doctor-patient relationship.

Sanders said, "Many HMOs use what are essentially 'fee-for-denying-service' systems, which pay doctors for denying care and penalize them for providing it. 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."

Sanders said he is also concerned about the secrecy of many HMO policies. "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. So, some insurance companies are taking steps to make sure you don't know what they are doing. They keep their incentive plans secret from their customers, and in many cases, keep both patients and doctors in the dark about the formulas used to approve or deny coverage," he said.

Sanders said another disturbing trend his legislation will address is the tendency by HMOs to include "gag rules" in contracts that tell doctors what they can and can not say to their patients.

Jan Trepanier, Executive Director of the Vermont Psychological Association, said the 300-member organization has been tracking trends in managed care since 1991. "One shocking issue is the so-called gag rules that are provided in contracts. One contract went so far as to say providers could never say disparaging remarks about the HMO even after the contract had been terminated. VPA strongly opposes any type of gag rules in managed care contracts. It is an unconscionable issue and should not be allowed."

Judith Mann, a psychologist with Family Therapy Associates in Essex Junction, said a managed care company denied hospital care to two of her teenage patients who were at serious risk of suicide, with no explanation to the psychologists. "This seemingly arbitrary denial of benefits interfered with our suicide prevention strategies and it eventually proved disastrous. In both these cases, within one week after denying care, these girls had a serious suicide attempt," she said.

Mann noted that her practice was dropped by the HMO within 24 hours of reporting the incident to the Vermont Department of Banking and Insurance. She is concerned that many other

providers may be afraid of speaking out for fear of the same result. Mann said she is supporting Sanders' legislation in the hopes that it will prevent profit margins from controlling care in the future. "This legislation supports the heart and soul of good health care because it protects and preserves the relationship that doctors have with their patients. If these practices don't change, cases like this will become the norm rather than the exception."

Sanders legislation is endorsed by Consumers Union, the American Nurses Association, the Vermont Psychological Association, and the American Psychological Association.

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