

*BMJ* 1995;310:335 (4 February)

## To heal on wheels

Most people have heard of "meals on wheels," a service that provides ready made food to the homes of sick and infirm pensioners. But now comes "therapy on wheels," provided by Mobile Psychological Services of New York City. Patients enter a luxurious van, relax in plush leather seats, and discuss their problems with a psychologist while a chauffeur, seated in front of a soundproof glass for privacy, drives them to work, to shop, or, most often, to the airport.

Reflecting the trend towards less expensive outpatient care, this service is provided for only \$175 per hour--a considerable saving for busy executives and housewives who otherwise would be unable to make time for their therapy. No frequent user miles are as yet provided, but discussions are continued for free if the van gets stuck in traffic. There are special rates for family groups, and perhaps the programme will be expanded to mobile eye, ear, or colon examinations before work or a quick laparoscopic cholecystectomy on the way back after a busy day at the office.

Similar programmes may also become available on airplanes, especially on transatlantic flights, where there is always the consolation of a refreshing dip in the ocean should things go wrong. Short trips, however, should at least allow time for acupuncture, accelerated mud baths, herbal wraps, and releasing energy blocks.

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Competing with such ambulatory services are institution based spas. These are a relatively recent development in a country that never took seriously the benefits afforded by a sojourn at Karlsbad or Abano Terme. Here white coated therapists prescribe ayurvedic herbs to draw out the bodily toxins of clients from all over the country. They use massage, diets, and relaxation therapy; and they wear thick gloves as they apply towels boiled in herbs or wrap their non-claustrophobic clients in cellophane and blankets to allow "injurious substances" to diffuse out. Under these conditions informality reigns, as white coated therapists named Bunny or Kimmy cheerfully shake hands with their patients--mostly women--and greet them by their first names. But they quickly become sober faced as they enter their treatment rooms, where they explain the physiological implications of opening pores, balancing energy pathways, and restoring essential forces. The patients have only to lie down and be still and later buy a book with an approved treatment plan, so that they can continue their therapy at home, at least pending the institution of a massage on wheels service.

The men, meanwhile, restore themselves in wet or dry saunas, jacuzzis, or by lounging around TV sets clad in white terry cloth dressing robes and reading Fortune magazine or watching football. Both genders look considerably better than in skimpy hospital gowns, but then the robes come off in the exercise room, where in the pursuit of youth, beauty, and immortality they flagellate themselves on treadmills, stepmasters, and weightlifting machines.

None of this has yet come to be regarded as an entitlement, a right, a service to be provided by the government, not even by liberal health reformers. It has, however, become the right thing to do. For why otherwise would our presidents jog in full view of the television cameras, just as in the Middle Ages the great monarch prayed on his knees in public, to be seen by all?