

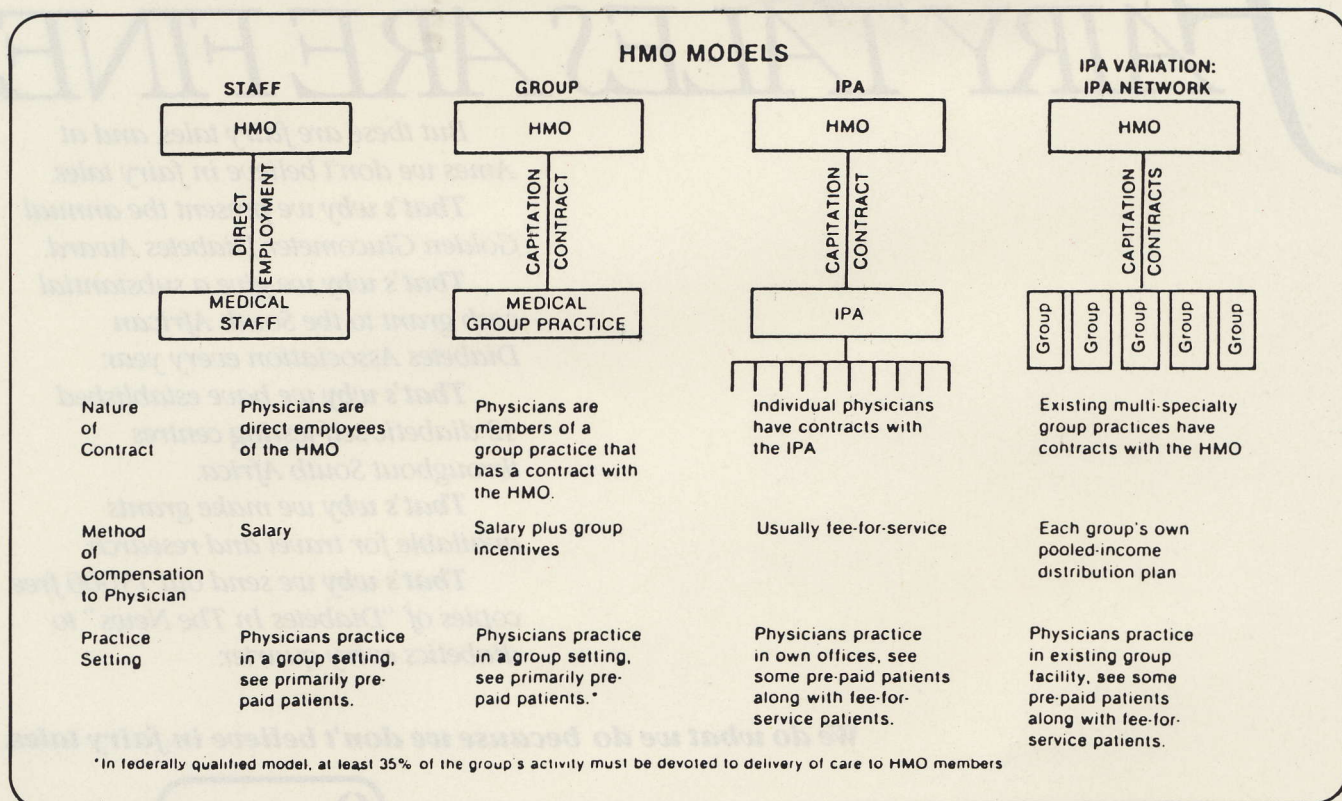
Are HMOs the answer?

HEALTH Maintenance Organisation (HMO) propagandists are presently doing their utmost to persuade the policy makers that they have the answer to South Africa's health problems. The argument goes that the public sector cannot cope with the expansion needed in the development of health care services; in keeping with the general policy of privatisation, health care delivery should thus also be privatised.

The public sector will thus remain static or be allowed to shrink, spending all its resources on the indigent. Growth in services will thus be transferred to the private sector. To cope with this growth, HMO's are offered as a solution. People will pay for their care by means of increasing num-

bers of Blacks being insured in medical aid schemes, or by means of prepaid HMO type schemes. The possibility of the State insuring all people who are unable to be otherwise insured is also being discussed. The State will then, as it were, pay for the service obtained in the private sector instead of rendering the service. If this occurs, there will be a massive expansion of the private sector.

It is perhaps good to look at the models of Health Maintenance Organisations available, as some feel that this expansion should take place in the form of HMO type organisations or Benefit Societies. The following diagram is taken from the American Medical Association's booklet on Independent Practice Associations (IPA).



We need to make up our own minds if the system can be adapted for Southern Africa. Will it contribute to better health care for all or will it further increase differential

health care standards? Will it improve or cause deterioration in the doctor-patient relationship and the standard of primary care?