

# ATLANTA BUSINESS CHRONICLE

April 16-22, 2004

atlanta.bizjournals.com

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**HMO HELP.** From the people that brought you managed care comes a new service that claims to help employers cut through HMO red tape. **Health Advocate, Inc.**, based in Blue Bell, Pa., hopes to expand its services in the Southeast.

The company charges employers a fee and in return offers workers a "personal health advocate" — usually a nurse — who can be contacted by phone and will answer questions and solve health-insurance problems as they arise. Officials said the advocate can help in a variety of situations, from making an appointment with a specialist to correcting a billing problem.

Employers pay between \$1.50 and \$4 per employee for the service per month, according to Carol Fischer, director of



## MEDICAL ALERT

Megan Woolhouse

communications. Atlanta-based **The Home Depot Inc.** has signed up 147,000 employees for the program. The company employed 299,000 employees at the end of 2003, according to its annual report. Health Advocate officials said 296 employers use the service nationwide, providing assistance to 350,000 employees and their families.

Health Advocate was started two years ago by a group of former Aetna health-insurance executives, including the company's former chief financial officer in charge of HMOs and its former chief medical officer.

"Who better to handle (HMO problems)," Fischer said. ". . . I watched the history of HMOs develop, and none of it was intended to be this complicated."