



Mind Matters Research

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From: Lyn Freeman, Ph.D.
To: Rep. Ivy Spohnholz
Date: February 2, 2019

Subject:

For bill entitled: An act related to insurance coverage for benefits provided through telehealth; and providing for an effective date.

I am a licensed professional counselor in Anchorage, and also a former NIH-funded mind-body and cancer researcher. My master's degree is in human sciences and my Ph.D. in psychology. My work and clinical outcomes have been published in peer-reviewed journals and I am also author of academic textbooks and medical manuals. I provide psychological care to patients with serious medical conditions, by physician referral only.

The patients I treat have medical conditions that may include, but are not limited to, cancer, Parkinson's disease, various auto-immune diseases, traumatic brain injury, cognitive impairment and chronic pain, both physical and emotional. Additionally, many of the persons I treat suffer from chronic fatigue, sleep deprivation, and depression or anxiety. Some are in wheel chairs and not able to travel to my office without great effort and discomfort. Others live in bush Alaska and have no options for specialized care if telehealth is denied to them.

How do I utilize telehealth to the benefit of these patients? Although my personal preference would be to see all patients in my office at Alaska Regional Hospital, this is often not possible or even the best treatment option for the patient in question. In addition to the treatment of depression, anxiety, pain and fear, I also specialize in behavioral and perceptual change therapy that help patients adapt their way of living and thinking to support better medical and psychological outcomes. This is accomplished by working hand in hand with the physicians who referred the patients to me.

When insurance companies balk at paying for telehealth, or (as now seems to be occurring) want patients to only see counselors or therapists who are contracted directly to the insurance company, this severely limits patient options. I understand that there is a move in that direction in the industry. I hope this will not prevail, as this will prevent specialized care for the patients I see, where physician and counselor work as a team. We both have full access to patient medical and psychological records and can case patient progress or lack thereof. I seriously doubt any insurance company can provide this level of communication and follow-thru.

I had the opportunity last year to speak with a 'counselor' through the insurance-based telehealth type of service provided to me, and was able to identify they had no access to my medical or psychological information; no relationship with other providers in the state; and certainly could not match provider specialty to patient need. I am deeply concerned with insurance company attempts to interfere with the treatment provided by local providers, by attempting to circumvent local and team-based patient services.

In summary, it is important to make it possible for patients to access telehealth with their local providers without being 'herded' into a lesser form of care by insurance companies or denied telehealth altogether. I urge the legislature to make telehealth available to Alaska patients, and without prejudice against their local providers.

Please do not hesitate to call me if I can be of further service.

Sincerely,



Lyn Freeman, PhD, LPC
Director of Integrative Medicine
Alaska Regional Hospital

