

Telemedicine:

Convenient, Cost-Effective Way to Improve Access to Healthcare

Advancements in medical and communications technology improve delivery and accessibility of healthcare, especially in the field of telemedicine.

Telemedicine technologies enable secure electronic communications and exchange of information between a licensed physician in one location and a patient in another. Telemedicine is not a new concept, but rather a version of traditional cross coverage – where one physician temporarily takes care of another’s patients.

Legislation should enhance, not diminish access to telemedicine by:

- 1 MAXIMIZING THE TYPES OF TECHNOLOGY THAT CAN BE USED
- 2 REQUIRING SECURE (HIPPA COMPLIANT) USE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
- 3 REQUIRING A COMPLETE MEDICAL HISTORY BE PROVIDED AND REVIEWED
- 4 ELIMINATING BARRIERS SUCH AS REQUIRING PRIOR IN-PERSON VISITS

Telemedicine is like other forms of cross coverage. It is not designed to replace the traditional long-term relationship between a patient and primary care physician (PCP). Telemedicine often helps a patient establish a relationship with a PCP that can lead to overall improvement in health. In fact, half of Teladoc’s patients reported no contact with any physician in the past year.

Telemedicine is safe. 100% of the time, the patient must provide a complete personal health record through the telemedicine platform, often times supported by the medical history provided by the patient’s health plan. The physician must review the data before the real time consultation is arranged. In the practice of traditional cross coverage, the covering physician may not have access to the patient’s Electronic Medical Record (EMR). The standards and quality of care for patients treated through telemedicine is at least equal to an in-person encounter.

Telemedicine provides cost-effective care. A Teladoc visit is just 30% of the cost of a traditional PCP visit, 25% of an urgent care visit and only 2.5% of an emergency room visit. The cost savings to patients, employers,

Medicare and Medicaid is substantial. As an additional benefit, there is a significant reduction of unnecessary emergency room visits, improving access for true medical emergencies.

Telemedicine provides an additional way for patients to access care. While this is particularly important to rural areas, it is also an effective way to provide timely access to those who travel frequently or who may not have the flexibility to access a physician’s office during regular business hours. It is a health care service for which there is growing consumer demand.

State laws and regulations often lag behind technology – such is the case where telemedicine is concerned. However, Teladoc is operating in 48 states, including some where the statute is silent on the topic. Other states have enacted legislation to address telemedicine specifically and encourage its use.

Most recently, Virginia passed legislation that is closely aligned with a 2014 model policy recommendation by the Federation of State Medical Boards (FSMB). Among the recommendations made by FSMB is allowing the establishment of the patient-physician relationship solely through telemedicine technology – not requiring an in-person encounter.

California, Arizona, Colorado, North Carolina, Maryland, Louisiana, Utah and others have enacted legislation that specifically addresses telemedicine in a similar manner to Virginia and the FSMB model. Many states remain silent on the specific need for an in-person encounter.