

## Testimony to Special Committee on Health Regarding Telemedicine Services

I am Dennis Shelby, CEO of Wilson Medical Center in Neodesha, Kansas. We have been providing telemedicine services in our Emergency Room through Avera since November 2014. We have offered telemedicine for medical specialists on an outpatient basis and telehospitalist services on the inpatient hospital side since February 2016. The specialists are provided by FreeState Healthcare. The physicians they provide are for those specialties that do not come to our community. The specialties are:

Internal Medicine	Rheumatology
Internal Medicine/Pediatrics	Dermatology
Infectious Disease	Endocrinology
Psychiatry	Dietary/Diabetes
Neurology	

This program has improved the access to care close to the patient's home. Prior to this telemedicine service, patients in our area would have to travel two to three hours away for an appointment and then have to wait in the physician office lobby for an hour before being seen. For most of these specialties, the wait to even get an appointment could be anywhere from two to four months. Here are the benefits to the patients receiving this service:

- Timely appointments within two to three weeks, sometimes quicker;
- Quality providers from all over the country who are licensed to practice in Kansas;
- Pain and suffering – a number of the medical conditions these people have make it extremely difficult to travel long distances and then back home;
- Transportation issues and burdens – many have to depend on friends or family to take them to appointments;
- Cost – the cost of gasoline, food, and lodging is very expensive. If they have an early morning appointment, they have to stay in a hotel. Many patients do not drive when it is dark;
- Most people who live in a rural setting find it stressful to drive in an urban city.

This is a service any patient should be able to access. It is a service paid by insurance companies. Medicare does pay for these services. A number of insurance companies do not cover this medical service. Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Kansas is not covering consistently for telemedicine services and they will not cover for primary care services, such as telehospitalists. Blue Cross/Blue Shield in surrounding states are covering the service. Aetna is another insurance company that refuses to cover this service.

As a rural community, we find it difficult to recruit primary care physicians. Our physicians are aged and/or tired due to "call coverage rotations and responsibilities." This is where the telehospitalist services help. They are able to round on hospital patients on weekends with the assistance of a nurse. This allows our physicians a much deserved break to relax and spend time with their family and friends. It is important that telehospitalist and telemedicine services be covered by insurance. Our rural communities deserve this service.

Telemedicine is going to continue to grow. The VA offers it, the young people demand it, and our older citizens deserve it. We did not start this program to be "cool." We started it to better serve our rural

citizens, improve access to quality care, and provide a much needed break to our overworked medical providers.

I have included two patient testimonials below:

Telemedicine allowed William, age 70 and a rheumatology patient, to be treated at our hospital when he developed an infection. He was progressively becoming weaker, running a fever, and unable to walk. His primary care physician admitted him to our facility and consulted with Dr. Elisha Yaghmai, an internal medicine physician, via telemedicine, who in turn consulted with William's telemedicine rheumatologist. They were able to treat the patient at our facility instead of having to transfer him to Wichita. His wife was very happy about receiving the care here and not having to go to Wichita as she does not like to drive in the city. The patient has been seen on two follow-up visits with the rheumatologist and he is so much better – walking, the swelling of hand and ankle has decreased, and he is able to do things outside. Each time they have been here for telemedicine appointments, they tell us how grateful they are for the telemedicine services at Wilson Medical Center.

Kyton, age 5, was referred for dermatology and pediatrics. When making his appointments, his mother asked if it was possible to schedule the appointments on the same day since he had just started kindergarten. She did not want him to miss a lot of school time. We worked with FreeState and were able to schedule appointments at 8 and 8:30 the same day. Kyton completed his appointments by 9:30 and missed very little school. The mother was pleased that she did not have to travel far or on two different days to see two different specialists.

If I can answer any questions, please feel like you can reach out to me.

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