

Telemedicine Testimony to 2017 Special Committee on Health

On behalf of Via Christi Health, Dee Dee Dewell, Director of Critical Access Hospital Networks and Peter Moyer, Manager of Care Redesign would like to offer the following comments to support the expansion of telemedicine in the state of Kansas.

Via Christi serves patients throughout rural Kansas with multi-specialty services. Rural communities are challenged by physician shortages and they don't have easy access to specialty care, requiring long distance travel for care.

Example: Marilyn Dewell

Marilyn lives in southwest Kansas and has traveled several times to/from Wichita for surgeries that require simple follow up visits that could easily have been done through telemedicine. The round trip is 326 miles, she is unable to drive and relies on family for transportation. A family member has to take time off work to drive her, there is always a potential for poor weather conditions and often, she experiences discomfort and pain during the ride. I know this is a common story for many in rural areas.

Via Christi's experience in the use of telemedicine services includes:

- e-Pharmacy (Pharmacists in several states review orders for multiple sites including some rural)
- Behavioral health assessment center in ED
- Home Health – 1 specially trained nurse consults with patients across KS & OK
- NetClinic (virtual technology)
 - Diabetes classes
 - Health coaching
 - Behavioral health coaching
 - Back pain management
 - Best for baby
 - Chronic disease navigation & management

More applications of telemedicine could be used if a better payment model was in place.

Via Christi specialists receive requests from rural areas on a regular basis to provide outreach clinics in their communities. They are challenged with wanting to serve those patients, but don't have the capacity to do so because of distance, time and cost constraints.

Example: Dr. Michael Wolfe, OB/GYN, Maternal & Fetal Medicine

- Travels by plane and rental car to Lakin once a month (funded by Children's Miracle Network)
 - Sees high risk OB patients
 - 1 full day away from clinic/patient visits
 - Distance, time and cost limits frequency to follow patients (telemedicine enables more frequent interaction)
 - Very successful clinic, but limits his capacity to serve other areas with same need

Most of these challenges could be overcome with the use of telemedicine. Telemedicine can provide:

- Reliable care at the right place and time; advanced care close to home, which is better for patients
- Timely access to providers, especially in medically underserved areas
- Efficient provision of care (1 physician can provide care to multiple sites from one location)
- Hospitals and other facilities with more options for provider coverage
- Struggling, rural hospitals with benefit of keeping patients local for ancillary services

Rural areas could benefit greatly from telemedicine use to:

- Decrease travel cost, risk, time and stress
- Enable rural hospitals to keep patients in their communities, close to home
- Increase patient satisfaction
- Improve rural provider recruitment, retention and satisfaction
- Provide access to comprehensive care at lower cost (Primary Care, Specialists, Emergency Room, Hospitalist)

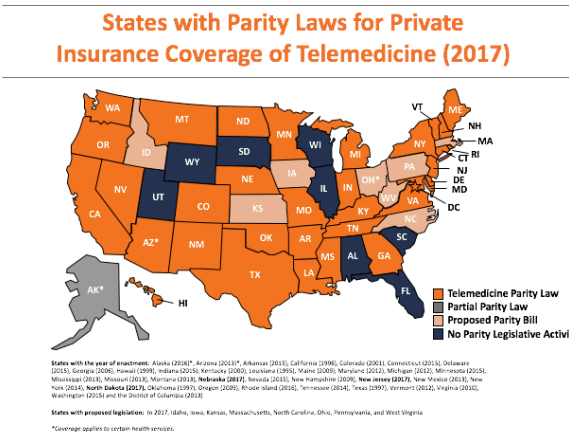
Wichita and other metropolitan areas also greatly benefit from using telemedicine as:

- Large employers want access to care on site
- Consumers want convenience and the demand is rising (patient satisfaction)
- It extends the capacity of specialty care
- specialty gaps can be covered where there are shortages and recruitment challenges
- Unnecessary emergency room visits can be avoided
- It reinforces team-based care and communication

Telemedicine technology is advanced and services are very available, but adoption and expansion are hindered by several barriers:

- Resistance by payers to new innovative and disruptive models of providing care
- Reimbursement challenges for rural and metropolitan areas
 - Commercial payers - not required to reimburse
 - Medicare- Geographic and facility restrictions
- Broadband
 - Some rural areas have inadequate Internet/cellular connectivity

Via Christi is supportive of any efforts to remove these barriers to allow better access to quality, cost effective care and increase patient and provider satisfaction. All states surrounding Kansas have parity laws in place. A parity law in Kansas would bring us in alignment with those payments models. The interstate medical licensure compact Kansas signed on to lends itself to the use of telemedicine in streamlining processes for providers to work across state lines.



As a primarily rural state with a largely aging population, Kansas has every good reason for advancing telemedicine use. Thank you for consideration of our comments. Please contact us if you have any questions or would like additional information.