



Thomas L. Bell
President

To: Interim Special Committee on Health

From: Audrey Dunkel, Vice President Financial Advocacy

Date: October 20, 2017

Re: Telemedicine in Kansas

The Kansas Hospital Association appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the growing importance of telemedicine services in Kansas. It is the belief of our members that through the advancement of this technology and its utilization, Kansans will experience high quality, accessible care anywhere in Kansas. The KHA and its members urge thoughtful consideration by the Interim Special Committee on Health of the benefits that may be achieved through greater adoption.

Oftentimes individuals use the terms “telehealth” and “telemedicine” interchangeably, however, their meanings are not necessarily the same. According to the American Telemedicine Association, the term “telemedicine” is the use of medical information exchanged from one site to another via electronic communications to improve patients’ health status. Whereas, the term “telehealth” often encompasses a broader definition of remote healthcare that does not always involve clinical services. As telehealth and telemedicine begin to have a larger presence in Kansas, the state will need to consider developing clear definitions to reduce the ambiguity and ensure proper recognition of the technology. Legislation introduced last session, House Bill 2254, contained some of the standard definitions that should be considered.

Telemedicine brings many benefits to Kansas from a variety of perspectives.

- Patients have increased access to services that may not be readily available in their community. This access to care is not only more convenient to the patient, but also may reduce long term health care costs associated with treatment avoidance due to lack of available services.
- Physicians and other health care providers realize benefits with telemedicine as well. It provides clinical support when needed as well as local coverage in areas that may have health care provider shortages.
- Communities not only have access to services that may not otherwise be as readily available, but it also keeps the healthcare dollar in the local community.
- Employers benefit from telemedicine by a reduction in “lost work” time since healthcare can be provided locally.

Kansas Hospital Association

215 SE 8th Ave. • PO Box 2308 • Topeka, KS 66601-2308 • (785) 233-7436 • FAX: (785) 233-6955 • www.kha-net.org

Despite its benefits, there continue to be barriers to a more robust implementation of telemedicine, primary related to reimbursement. According to the American Telemedicine Association, more than half of the states across the U.S. have implemented some form of payment parity for telemedicine services. In essence, payment parity provides reimbursement for telemedicine services at the same level as services provided in a face-to-face setting. The recognition and payment of telemedicine services has varied among public and private payers. At present, Medicare and Medicaid typically provide some level of reimbursement for telemedicine services. However, the level of reimbursement by commercial insurance carriers is much more varied. If not already requested, KHA would formally ask that the Interim Special Committee on Health request the Kansas Legislative Research Department conduct a review of the telemedicine payment policies for commercial insurance carriers offering plans in Kansas and summarize the current practices and standards.

KHA believes every Kansan deserves access to quality health care. Telemedicine is one way to ensure that our rural communities have the same access to health services as urban areas. The rural nature of our state coupled with the anticipated health care workforce shortages in future years makes encouraging telemedicine programs in Kansas imperative.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.