

Testimony on House Bill 2206

House Committee on Health and Human Services

Secretary Susan Mosier, MD, MBA, FACS Kansas Department of Health and Environment

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House Bill 2206 provides an important framework upon which we can expand telemedicine utilization in the state of Kansas. The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) describes telemedicine as the “the use of electronic communication and information technologies to provide or support clinical care at a distance.” Practically speaking, telemedicine allows physicians to evaluate patients and provide care from remote locations. This technology enables an internal medicine doctor to oversee the hospitalization of a patient over 200 miles away, an ophthalmologist to review a retinal scan on someone they have never met in person or a psychiatrist to manage a person’s behavioral health needs without requiring the patient to spend a day traveling. The technology needed to provide exceptional care exists and is being used across the nation. This bill provides the infrastructure needed to support telemedicine growth and sustainability in Kansas.

92 Kansas counties are designated as primary care health professional shortage areas and 100 Kansas counties are designated as behavioral health professional shortage areas. Recruiting and retaining health professionals in Kansas is challenging and the competition for providers among states is fierce. Access to health professionals is a national problem that is getting worse. The Association of American Medical Colleges projects our national physician shortfall to be between 61,700 and 94,700 physicians by 2025. In short, the demand for health professionals will continue to increase in the coming years. The resulting competitive environment for health professionals demands a multi-faceted solution. We must not only consider how do we increase the number of health professionals in the state of Kansas; but also, how do we leverage the latest technology to expand the impact of the professionals we have?

According to the American Telemedicine Association, 15 million people were helped by telemedicine in 2015. This represents a 50% increase in 2 years. Additionally, 42 states introduced more than 200 telemedicine laws in 2015. This field of medicine is rapidly expanding for numerous reasons- access to care, patient demand, availability of technology to name a few. Last fall, U.S. News & World Report wrote an article on Virtual Care Clinics. The article highlighted Mercy Virtual Care Center where care is provided to patients in their homes to treat conditions like chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. The Virtual Care Center also provides support to 38 different hospitals in seven states. A couple of examples of their hospital services include specialists observing patients and directing care at distant ICUs or providing guidance on stroke treatment to community hospitals. The health system’s president reported mortality rate in their ICU program was trending 40 percent lower than predicted and saved \$40 million dollars. Although there are many ways to utilize telemedicine, the common thread to all these initiatives is patients have the ability to stay in their communities to receive needed health care. The right care, in the right place, and at the right time.

References & Notes

- Kansas currently has 92 out of 105 counties that are designated as Health Professional Shortage Areas.
- “Physician demand continues to grow faster than supply leading to a projected shortfall of between 61,700 and 94,700 physicians by 2025.”
(https://www.aamc.org/download/458082/data/2016_complexities_of_supply_and_demand_projections.pdf)
- In 2015, 15M people helped by telemedicine (up 50% from 2 years previous). 165,000 mHealth Apps from 45,000 vendors, 32% of consumers had at least one health app on their phone, More than 200 telemedicine laws introduced in 42 states, In 2016, estimated 1.25M people will use online Direct to Consumer
https://www.aamc.org/download/458082/data/2016_complexities_of_supply_and_demand_projections.pdf
- Virtual Care Clinic in Chesterfield, MO: <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2016-08-17/are-virtual-care-clinics-the-wave-of-the-future>