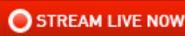


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## HUFFPOST HEALTHY LIVING

## Telemedicine: An Innovation Whose Time Has Come

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In the decades since I started practicing medicine, the nation's health care landscape has changed dramatically due in great part to technology. Procedures that were once rare have now become routine. Ailments that used to be the scourge of thousands are now prevented with a simple vaccination. Medical technology has enabled a host of improvements in health care delivery, but through the years, one aspect of practicing medicine remains unchanged and deeply personal: the doctor-patient relationship.

Now, with the introduction of new devices along an invisible delivery network -- the Internet -- patients and their health care professionals, including physicians, nurses, physician assistants and dentists have the opportunity to connect virtually. In the past, patients have too often been limited in their ability to reach their health care professionals due to illness or transportation or mobility issues. But today, these same professionals and patients can connect online, reducing many obstacles to quality patient care. With a nationwide broadband network and the commonplace use of personal computers, handheld tablets and smartphones, it simply makes health sense and economic sense for many Americans to receive health advice via virtual platforms.

One population for whom telemedicine is particularly helpful is the senior community. Approximately 50 million people with disabilities live in the United States and could benefit greatly from the advantages of telemedicine. Unfortunately, a system of outdated state licensure laws makes that nearly impossible. For example, to practice telemedicine across state lines, physicians must obtain multiple state licenses and follow different state laws. This archaic system of rules is ultimately a barrier to the very thing the rules were established to help provide: affordable and quality health care. The evolving science and technological innovations have moved beyond our antiquated rules, regulations and policies.

Fortunately, some lawmakers in Washington, D.C., have started to recognize this obstacle to delivering quality care and have introduced legislation to help address the problem -- and help patients. Congress is considering a number of pieces of legislation, like the new bipartisan bill recently introduced by Reps. Devin Nunes (R-CA) and Frank Pallone (D-NJ), the Tele-Med Act of 2013, which would enable health care professionals licensed in one state to provide care to Medicare patients across state lines electronically. The bill builds on a successful telemedicine program for military personnel and veterans -- one that has greatly improved health care access for the military community, while reducing costs.

Two years ago, Congress passed the Servicemembers' Telemedicine and E-Health Portability Act, which allows credentialed health care professionals to provide care across state lines to military personnel and veterans without having to obtain a new medical license in each state where a patient resides. The law has resulted in a drastic reduction in hospitalizations for those people who were supported by the program, not to mention a savings of \$2,000 per patient per year.

While the focus of the new bill is on Medicare beneficiaries -- and rightly so -- it is also a very positive development for physicians. Establishing and building long-term relationships with patients is one of the most important and rewarding aspects for any health care professional. With increased doctor-patient contact -- whether in the same office or via the Internet or phone -- comes an increased awareness about that patient's needs and medical history, thereby providing superior care with reduced costs.

Advancing telemedicine is a good step in the right direction which will allow the medical field to fully harness the promise of new and innovative technology no matter where the patient or her doctor are.

*For more by Richard H. Carmona, M.D., click here.*

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