



Telehealth: An Emerging Solution to Improve Access to Care ICEP Urges Support of SB 2366

The Illinois College of Emergency Physicians (ICEP) strongly recommends passage of SB 2366. The implementation of telehealth tools throughout Illinois will reduce costs, improve quality, and increase access to health care for all patients in Illinois.

- Telephone or videoconferencing consultation with a health care provider can be used to improve all aspects of the patient experience, from prompt assessment and diagnosis to early initiation of treatment to discharge planning and follow-up services.
- Telehealth services provide additional options for patients in rural and urban medically underserved areas whose access to care is limited or blocked by a lack of primary and specialty care providers, time and distance barriers, and transportation limitations.
- The use of information and telecommunications technology to deliver health care services has the potential for significant cost savings for patients and hospitals/other health care facilities.

The application of telehealth to behavioral health concerns is particularly useful. Decreases in funding continue to threaten state mental health resources, leading to a reduction of services for psychiatric patients. As more psychiatric patients turn to the emergency room as one of the only sources available for care, access to emergency care for all patients is threatened.

- Telepsychiatry in the emergency department relieves some of the burden placed by the influx of psychiatric patients. The goals of telepsychiatry in the emergency setting are reduced admissions and lengths of stay, presenting significant potential savings for hospitals.
- A statewide telepsychiatry consultation network was developed for South Carolina hospital emergency rooms. The program produced measurable results in terms of patient outcomes and cost savings:
 - The average length of stay for patients experiencing a behavioral crisis across participating hospitals declined from **six to three days**.
 - One hospital reported a **savings of \$150,000** in the first eight months of its participation.

The potential benefits of telehealth are significant but in order to be fully realized, it is vital that health insurance policies provide coverage for services delivered by this method.

- Insurers should not be permitted to exclude from coverage a health care service solely because it is provided through telehealth.
- In-person contact between a health care provider and a patient should no longer be required before payment is made for the covered services.

ICEP urges the General Assembly to consider the cost-saving and health care-improvement ramifications that will result from the implementation of telehealth services. Passing SB 2366 will ensure this technology is available to improve the health of citizens of Illinois by defining the parameters of applicability and utility in an appropriate and useful manner.