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Bringing HEART to Home Care

TESTIMONY

Delivered by Paulette Sementilli, RN, Telehealth Coordinator
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Before the Human Services Committee

March 11, 2014

**IN SUPPORT OF House Bill HB 5445:
AN ACT CONCERNING MEDICAID COVERAGE OF TELEMONITORING SERVICES**

Good afternoon Senator Slossberg, Representative Abercrombie, and members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Paulette Sementilli, Registered Nurse and Telehealth Coordinator of Visiting Nurse Services of Connecticut, Inc, one of the state's oldest and largest, nonprofit, home healthcare providers. My agency serves 9,000 residents of Fairfield, New Haven, and Litchfield counties with over 255,000 home visits, including 2,000 patients under Medicaid health insurance coverage.

I have managed the Telehealth program for Visiting Nurse Services of Connecticut for more than three years and have been a Registered Nurse for more than eight years. Working for the maintenance and promotion of community health has given me insight into the most effective techniques to manage chronic illnesses.

Chronic illnesses are the primary health issue confronting those receiving healthcare assistance at home. This is especially true for the Medicaid population. Chronic illness management is best accomplished by maintaining the necessary life-long lifestyle changes and monitoring symptoms. Telehealth monitoring devices assist patients in achieving these changes and help in daily monitoring weight, blood pressure, blood glucose level, oxygenation, and pulse rate. Monitoring devices help to promote active patient engagement and education about the effects of poor health behaviors.

At a cost per patient of approximately \$400 per month, telehealth devices also provide clinicians the opportunity to intervene before symptoms escalate, potentially resulting in expensive hospitalizations. Patient outcomes demonstrate that telemonitoring helps to reduce health care expenditures.

The home based monitors utilized in telehealth, unfortunately, are not Medicaid reimbursable. This lack of reimbursement specific to telehealth coupled with the low reimbursement rates for Medicaid home health visits have caused us to make the difficult decision to no longer provide telehealth services to our Medicaid population. Patients are and will continue to lose out on the benefits of this tool, leading to even greater health disparities in treatments and outcomes. Our reality is that the agency has a responsibility to keep our expenses in reasonable range in order

to maintain a healthy fiscal outcome and organizational viability and, unfortunately, cost cutting is one of the strategies to do so.

For our agency, telehealth has reduced our 30 day re-hospitalization rates for Medicare heart failure patients by about 5% compared to those patients that were not receiving telehealth services. Although Medicare doesn't specifically reimburse for telehealth, the episodic bundled payment does allow us to provide telehealth along with nursing visits to help the patient manage their chronic illness more consistently.

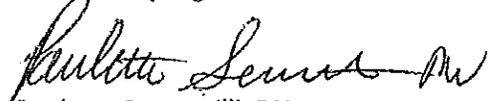
Without the ability to intervene and further promote the patient's self-management of their chronic illness, state funds will be paying for more expensive hospitalizations. The cost for Telehealth services are less than \$15 a day. This amount includes a device leasing fee, clinical support, installations, and equipment maintenance. The accumulated *telehealth monthly cost*, equates to *one day of nursing home care cost*. And the *annual cost* for telehealth, costs *less than one day of hospitalization care cost*.

We have found that the benefits of telehealth monitoring include:

- Patient engagement in their own care and monitoring
- Leading to better self-management of illness at home
- Can provide monitoring of symptoms less costly than frequent nursing visits
- Allows for early intervention of biometric changes preventing hospitalizations
- Allows for physicians to comfortably make medication changes knowing effects will be monitored
- Provides daily trending of condition to all involved clinicians allowing for continuity of care

In my professional telehealth experience, the benefits outweigh the financial cost of device implementation. It has been successfully shown to be a progressive form of healthcare so strongly that it has been adopted in 13 other states. I am **STRONGLY IN SUPPORT** of this act being passed and feel that fiscally it is more responsible to utilize this technology to provide the state with further cost savings while enhancing the oversight and person-centered care for the chronically ill.

Please contact me with any questions you have in regards to my telehealth knowledge and experience. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Visiting Nurses Services Telehealth program.



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