



**Written Testimony of Beka Apostolidis, RN, MS, Cardiac Program Manager at
VNA Healthcare**

**Before the Human Services Committee,
March 11, 2014**

Raised Bill HB 5445

**Testimony in Support of:
HB 5445 An Act Concerning Medicaid Coverage Of Telemonitoring Services**

Good afternoon Senator Slossberg, Representative Abercrombie and distinguished members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Beka Apostolidis and I have been a nurse for over eighteen years in the state of Connecticut. For the past ten years I have been employed by VNA Healthcare as a manager of their cardiac program. My role includes overseeing the telemonitor program. VNA Healthcare was the first homecare agency in the state to utilize telemonitors in patients' homes. In the early 90's, we began our program with just under 30 telemonitors and have grown to currently utilize over 300 telemonitors.

A telemonitor is a small device that is placed in a patient's home. It includes a scale, pulse oximeter and blood pressure cuff. In addition yes/no questions pertaining to the patient's specific diagnosis can be preprogrammed. The patient is asked to take a set of vital signs at a specific time each morning. The vitals are then transmitted via a phone line or cell tower to a designated central station where specially trained nurses analyze the data in real time. Any vital signs that fall outside the patient's parameters are automatically flagged. If needed a phone call is made to the patient to discuss any symptoms, diet or medication questions or concerns. The telemonitor nurse can also use the data for clinician decisions, including contacting the physician directly to discuss possible clinical interventions.

Recent national initiatives have called attention to preventing readmissions, especially those of 30 days, for disease states such as heart failure, pneumonia, and myocardial infarctions. Currently over 5 million Americans are affected by Heart Failure and the figure is expected to double over the next 25 years. Heart Failure patients are one of the most common patient groups in homecare.

Due to the complex physiological and psychological changes associated with Heart Failure, the national thirty day readmission rate for these patients is over 24%. In addition, these patients commonly suffer from depressive symptoms and a poor quality of life. Recent studies at VNA Healthcare in conjunction with the University of Connecticut School of Nursing have shown that the use of telemonitors along with specific nursing interventions on Heart Failure patients can statistically improve quality of life, reduce depressive symptoms and help reduce hospital readmissions. Additionally, VNA Healthcare has consistently reported a low 30 day HF telemonitor patient readmission rate. Over the past fiscal year, the average 30 day readmission rate for Heart Failure patients on a telemonitor was approximately 13%.

The telemonitor can be utilized for a number of different diagnoses, including, but not limited to cardiac, pulmonary, renal, neurologic and diabetic patients. It is especially beneficial in patients with chronic disease states. The need for the patient to take their vital signs every day contributes to increasing their self efficacy. Patients see a direct correlation as to how skipping medications or eating foods that are not part of their prescribed diet directly affects their vital signs and their health.

In addition, it provides peace of mind for not only patients, but also family members. No insurance company covers nursing care 7 days a week for any extended period of time. With the telemonitor, patients know that if any issues arise as a result from taking their vital signs, he/she will receive a call from the telemonitor nurse.

It's important to note that the telemonitor is used in conjunction with the RN case manager who makes in-home visits for hands-on assessment and teaching including chronic disease management, diet, and use of telemonitor to enhance disease self-management. These in-home visits coupled with daily telemonitoring help the patient better understand the disease and how their choices impact symptoms/potential problems.

As more and more patients require care at home, states will have to address this need in a fiscally viable manner. The telemonitor is a cost effective way to provide enhanced quality care to patients.

Thank you for your support regarding Medicaid coverage of telemonitoring services.

Regards
Beka Apostolidis