

MEMO

To: MMA Policy Council
From: Barb Daiker, PhD, MMA Quality Manager
Teresa Knoedler, JD, MMA Policy Counsel
Re: Expanding Telehealth Policy Forum – Summary
Date: October 8, 2014

Action Requested

1. Item to submit to MMA Board of Trustees:

The Policy Council recommends that the MMA Board of Trustees endorse legislation providing for parity of payment for telehealth services relative to face-to-face encounters.

2. Items for further Policy Council input:

A. What, if any, educational support or resources would the Policy Council like the MMA to develop around telehealth?

B. Are there other telehealth related policy issues that the Policy Council would like to consider?

Background

At its planning meetings, the MMA Policy Council identified telehealth as a priority topic for the MMA to address through a Policy Council-convened policy forum at its 2014 Annual Conference. Per this direction, the MMA hosted the *Expansion of Telehealth* forum on Friday, September 19, 2014. The goal of the forum was to engage Minnesota physicians for education, dialogue, and policy guidance on the key issues associated with the provision of telehealth services, and the increasing role of telehealth in care delivery. This memo will provide a summary of the forum, and lay out the issues that were identified by attendees.

Summary of Program

At the forum, there were approximately 35 individuals in attendance. The forum was moderated by Peter Dehnel, MD, a member of the MMA Policy Council.

The forum began with a live simulated telehealth encounter, conducted by Elisabeth Bilden, MD. Dr. Bilden is a toxicologist who has a robust telehealth practice in northern Minnesota. The encounter featured a telehealth “cart” provided by a local telehealth vendor. The encounter

focused on a “patient” with a suspected heroin overdose and was being cared for by a nurse in a rural emergency department. This simulation gave rise to many questions regarding operations, credentialing, licensure, and the physician-patient relationship.

After the telehealth simulation, attendees engaged in small-group discussion about what issues, opportunities, challenges and questions came to mind while watching the simulated telehealth forum. Attendees were asked to report back to the large group their table’s questions and observations.

Next, attendees heard three presentations. Zoi Hills, from gpTRAC (Great Plains Telehealth Resource and Assistance Center), a federally funded organization whose mission is to support telehealth advancement, presented on high-level operational issues relating to telehealth, including payment and IT.

Elisabeth Bilden, MD, gave a more formal presentation on her clinical experience with telehealth and discussed some of the practical barriers to entry, such as forming relationships with remote providers and setting up connections.

Finally, Jesse Berg, JD, presented an overview of key legal issues physicians need to know about telehealth. His presentation included discussion of privacy, security, licensing, and liability.

Audience Polling Questions - Summary of Results

Audience members were asked a series of polling questions to provide the MMA with a sense of who was in the audience, as well as to gauge their opinions on both the issue of advancing telehealth and their thoughts on the forum. Results of the polling questions can be found in *Appendix A*.

56% of the audience reported no experience with telehealth. Only 8% reported that telehealth is a significant part of the practice.

Of those who had telehealth experience, their reported experience was split between providing consultation, providing consultation and referring, and “other”.

When asked what was their ideal use of telehealth, approximately 11% chose “monitoring patient health remotely,” approximately 4% chose “starting patient records/accessing patient records over the internet,” approximately 54% chose “remote consultations with other providers,” and approximately 31% chose “offering services directly to patients (operating a virtual clinic)”.

The audience was asked “with what intensity should the MMA advance legislation to expedite interstate licensure”? Approximately 45% of the audience said “aggressively”; 20% said, “a lot”; and 20% said “some.”

The audience was asked “with what intensity should the MMA advocate parity in telehealth payment?”? Approximately 65% of the audience said “aggressively”; 9% said, “a lot”; and 21% said “some.”

Finally, the audience was asked to identify their top 3 barriers to advancing telehealth in their practice. The barriers with the most responses were “Unsure how to get started; unsure about regulations such as HIPAA, payment; and consent, and cost of technology”.

In regards to evaluating the forum, approximately 61% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that their learning objectives were met by this form. In addition, approximately 57% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the forum allowed their voice to be heard. When asked about their overall satisfaction with the forum, approximately 67% of respondents were strongly satisfied or satisfied. Finally, when the audience was asked how high telehealth ranks when they are considering important policy issues that affect the practice of medicine in Minnesota, approximately 41% said “high”; 38% said “medium”; and 21% said “low”.

Issues Raised

Below is a summary of issues that were raised during the forum.

- HIPAA concerns
 - Secure connections
 - Patient consent
- Payment
 - Unsure how payment works
 - Concern about not being reimbursed properly, or at all
 - Worried about pushback from payors
- Getting started
 - Cost of technology
 - Building relationships with other providers
 - IT confusion and intimidation
 - How to address needs
 - Don't have the time to figure things out on their own
- Licensure, credentialing, and interstate practice confusion

Next Steps

Of the issues discussed at the forum, one rose to the top for Policy Council consideration. Other issues were discussed but not resolved, or were polled on but not discussed to a degree that would support immediate MMA action.

- Payment Parity

The issue of parity of payment for telehealth services was discussed with some detail and was asked in the polling questions. It was clear from both discussion and polling that the audience felt strongly that payment disparity is a barrier to advancing telehealth, and that the MMA should work to advance payment parity. It was discussed that many other states have legislation to ensure payment parity, and the audience expressed interest in that.

- Interstate Licensure

The issue of interstate licensure was not discussed with detail by the audience. However, they were polled on the issue and expressed moderately strong support for the concept. The MMA is currently evaluating its position on an interstate licensure compact. The compact, drafted by the Federation of State Medical Boards, would permit expedited licensure in some circumstances. The MMA Committee on Ethics and Medical-Legal Affairs heard a presentation on the compact, and voted to recommend that the MMA Board of Trustees endorse the compact. The Board of Trustees will consider the issue at its next meeting on November 15.



APPENDIX A – Polling Question Results

Q #	Choice	Choice Text	Response Count	Response Pct
1	Which of the following reflects your experience with telehealth?			
	1	I have no experience	14	56.0%
	2	I have participated in fewer than 5 telehealth experiences.	4	16.0%
	3	I have many experiences with telehealth	5	20.0%
	4	Telehealth is a significant part of my practice	2	8.0%
		N	25	
2	If you have telehealth experience, which of following best reflects that experience?			
	1	I don't have telehealth experience	14	51.9%
	2	I refer patients to telehealth	1	3.7%
	3	I have provided consultations through telehealth	5	18.5%
	4	I have referred and provided consultations through telehealth	3	11.1%
	5	Other	4	14.8%
		N	27	
3	What is your ideal use of telehealth?			
	1	Monitoring patient health remotely	3	11.5%
	2	Storing patient records/accessing patient records via the internet	1	3.8%
	3	Remote consultations with other providers	14	53.8%



4	Offering services directly to patients (operating a “virtual” clinic)	8	30.8%
	N	26	
4	What advantages (if any) do you see with expanding your practice via telehealth?		
1	Not at all	3	8.8%
2	Communicate directly with patients via skype, email, texting, etc., to create more opportunities for delivery of care	5	14.7%
3	Consult with providers remotely as they see patients face-to-face at their site of service	17	50.0%
4	Opportunity to reach new patient base through providing care directly via the internet.	9	26.5%
	N	34	
5	How (if at all) do you use mobile devices in your practice?		
1	Not at all	6	17.1%
2	We provide employer-sponsored devices that can be used for limited purposes	6	17.1%
3	Employees can use personal devices, but only for limited purposes as dictated by company policy	17	48.6%
4	Employees can use personal devices for purposes as employees deem appropriate	6	17.1%
	N	35	
6	With what intensity should the MMA advance legislation to expedite interstate licensure?		
1	Not at all	3	8.3%
2	A little	3	8.3%
3	Some	7	19.4%
4	A lot	7	19.4%
5	Aggressively	16	44.4%
	N	36	
7	With what intensity should the MMA advocate parity in telehealth payment?		
1	Not at all	2	5.9%
2	A little	0	0.0%
3	Some	7	20.6%
4	A lot	3	8.8%



5	Aggressively	22	64.7%
N		34	
8	What are your biggest barriers to advancing telehealth in your practice? Pick 3		
1	High speed internet connections	6	18.8%
2	Cost of technology	16	50.0%
3	Unsure how to get started	15	46.9%
4	Unsure about regulations such as privacy, HIPAA, payment, and consent.	18	56.3%
5	Concerned about malpractice liability	9	28.1%
6	Credentialing resources	7	21.9%
7	Licensure	10	31.3%
8	Prescribing	6	18.8%
N		32	
9	This forum gave me the opportunity for my voice to be heard.		
1	Strongly disagree	5	13.5%
2	Disagree	1	2.7%
3	Neutral	10	27.0%
4	Agree	14	37.8%
5	Strongly agree	7	18.9%
N		37	
10	This forum met my learning objectives		
1	Strongly disagree	1	2.8%
2	Disagree	3	8.3%
3	Neutral	10	27.8%
4	Agree	16	44.4%
5	Strongly agree	6	16.7%
N		36	
11	What is your overall satisfaction with this forum?		
1	Strongly dissatisfied	0	0.0%
2	Dissatisfied	2	6.1%
3	Neutral	9	27.3%
4	Satisfied	17	51.5%
5	Strongly satisfied	5	15.2%
N		33	



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When you consider important policy issues that affect the practice of medicine, how high does telehealth rank?			
1	Low	7	20.6%
2	Medium	13	38.2%
3	High	14	41.2%
		N	34