

# Don't jump to conclusions on telemedicine

By **Donald Nokes** - June 26, 2020 1:46 am



*Donald Nokes*

As one of many business owners who pay more for health insurance than for any other expense besides payroll, I know firsthand that we need some help to make health care costs affordable. Telemedicine, with its convenience and assumed lower cost, seems like a viable solution.

Ever since the pandemic kept us from our nonemergency doctor's visits, many physicians and other health care providers have accelerated their adoption of telemedicine. When [Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island](#) announced that, during the pandemic, it would authorize telemedicine appointments and it would reimburse physicians at the same rate as an in-person visit, I was relieved. I felt that this would provide a thoughtful alternative for people with ailments to have a timelier

professional assessment. We all know that delays in care can oftentimes lead to additional (and preventable) complications.

What's more, this helpful response by Blue Cross and other health insurers can provide us with a very unique opportunity to evaluate the efficacy of telemedicine. As the data filters into these insurers, we can determine, through actual data, just how effective it is from both a quality-care perspective and an equally important cost perspective. Will the cost information show what we all expect: that it also reduces our overall health care costs?

If it does prove to be as beneficial as it seems it should, we can use the data to determine which ailments are appropriate for telemedicine. We can poll patients who experienced care through this medium and we can craft a thoughtful telemedicine strategy that is based on weeks of actual trials.

*Let us take a minute and properly study this.*

Instead of taking the time to truly understand the value of telemedicine and taking advantage of the opportunity to study the results of this unexpected experiment, our legislators are considering mandating that telemedicine be covered by our health insurers and forcing insurers to reimburse physicians at the same rate as an office visit.

Doesn't an on-site visit cost the doctor more than a telemedicine visit? Is it possible that paying for a telemedicine visit and then determining that the patient must come into the office anyway will actually significantly increase costs? Could telemedicine visits turn what would be one visit into two reimbursable visits? There are many other questions that experts in medicine and health care costs need to answer before we adopt what seems to be a clear and simple solution to a very complex health care quality and cost problem.

We need some help to make health care costs affordable. Telemedicine might eventually be mandated for health insurance coverage. It may be just what the doctor ordered. But before this legislation or executive orders are finalized, let us take a minute and properly study this and avoid some potential unintended consequences.

*Donald Nokes is the president and co-founder of [NetCenergy](#) LLC, an information technology support firm in Cranston.*