

Dear Anne,

I see the legislature is considering allowing physicians to continue to get paid for providing care by phone. Obviously, phone care is often a good thing because it allows access when there is no other safe and practical venue. It seems to me the question is about whether we will pay for phone care that "shouldn't be allowed" because without a physical exam, it must be considered sub-par. I can tell you that this has been a challenge forever. Patients have always called up and asked us to deal with problems that sometimes require hands-on evaluation. We have always gone as far as we safely can over the phone and then told them to come in (or go to the ER) if we cannot resolve it with the information available. This is exactly what happens during an office visit, as well. If I examine a patient and determine that they need an x-ray or lab test or specialty service that I don't have access to in my office, I refer them to another level of care. We may as well say that all doctors' offices must have immediate, on-site access to every type of procedure or doctors will not know how to practice!

CMS and the commercial insurers have long used telephone care as a kind of cost-shifting. Telephone care delivered by a competent professional is high-quality care, just like care in any other setting. It requires skill and judgement and consumes time and energy and ought to be paid for.

Thanks for all your good work!

Best wishes,

Ben

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