

Dear Committee Members,

I am an endocrinologist and have practiced in Rutland, Vermont for 13 years. I am writing to encourage you to require insurance companies to continue to reimburse for phone-only medical services beyond the current pandemic. I can address this topic from the perspective of both a health care provider and a patient.

My practice has been largely remote over the past several months. The majority of these remote visits have been phone only. My practice, and the population of Vermont in general, tend to be older. In addition to not having access to the equipment needed to conduct a video call, they are often intimidated by the use of technology. As well, the audio quality of a phone call is usually better than on a video call, which is very important in terms of good communication.

My patients have greatly appreciated the ability to continue to have access to care while staying safe during this pandemic. For many years, I have purposely spread out the time between visits of many older patients during the winter, because I did not want to risk having them come to the office when the weather was bad and risk falling; as well, I wanted to decrease their exposure during flu season. Being able to provide timely care to these patients because of the ability to conduct phone visits has been invaluable.

I also feel that the quality of care has improved because patients are able to have more frequent, brief visits, without having to take time off from work. As a specialist, my patients sometimes drive from an hour or more away, requiring them to take off a half day of work for an appointment. Being able to take a 20 minute break from work to discuss one's blood sugars is much more effective way to provide care and gets faster and better outcomes.

As a patient, or actually the mother of a patient, I have appreciated the convenience and quality of phone visits for a number of years. My daughter has required treatment for an eating disorder and to get her the outpatient care that she needed we literally had to drive the length of the state because her therapist was in Manchester and her psychiatrist in Burlington. Needless to say, it was very time consuming. When her therapist offered to do remote visits, which have been both video and audio only, it was such a relief. I will also attest to the efficacy of those phone only visits, knowing that my daughter's mental health has greatly improved as a result of them.

I appreciate your consideration in this matter and ask that you support continuation of coverage for audio only medical services.

Thank you,
Margaret Daly, MD