

Testimony of Zachary D. Walker

“Technology and Treatment: Telemedicine in the VA Healthcare System” - August 9, 2016.

Good Morning,

I am Zachary Walker, a veteran of the United States Navy from 1975 to 1979. My introduction to Telemedicine was presented to me by my Veteran's Administration (V.A.) medical clinic, not as an option, but as a last resort. My journey began when I received a phone call from my local V.A. clinic one day before my scheduled appointment that my appointment was canceled. The clinic informed me that my health care provider was not available. I was told the next available appointment would be in two months. Having already waited two months for an appointment, I requested to see the next available health care provider. Again, I was informed that the wait time would be two months because they were booked. I took the next available appointment; now having to wait four months to see a provider. I terminated the call feeling frustrated and angry that my health care was being jeopardized due to a back log in the system.

The next week, I called the V.A. clinic and asked to speak to the supervisor who was not available. I then provided my information for a return call. Not having received a return call for two days, I again called and spoke with a supervisor at the clinic. I reiterated my story, but it was apparent that she was unable and unwilling to help. She gave me some unclear information about how to proceed if my condition worsen, which I felt was not a solution to my problem. Out of desperation, I called my local V.A. representative and explained my situation. To my surprise, I received a call the next day from a clinic nurse, who presented the option of telemedicine. Initially, I was reluctant because being seen by a doctor through a monitor was counterproductive to any medical experience I have had in the past.

The nurse was through explaining the process and assured me that the doctor would have all my lab results. She also reviewed my medical history. I scheduled an appointment and was seen within a week. I arrived for my appointment and was escorted back to a examination room in a timely manner. I was seated in front of a monitor and two-way camera. The doctor introduced herself. She was very pleasant, did not appear rushed, and she was well prepared. It was evident based on her questions that she had reviewed my recent tests and medical history. During my appointment, the doctor ordered more tests and made a referral for a new medical condition she noted. She even apologized for not having the ability to examine me. Even more surprising, I received a call from her one week later with my test results.

In conclusion, I had a great experience with telemedicine. My appointment wait time was reduced from the normal two months to one week. My appointment started on time rather than the normal one hour lobby wait time. The doctor was not rushed during my appointment and took the time to listen to my concerns. The only obvious drawback is not having a doctor to physically examine you, but I would use telemedicine in the future. Telemedicine should be presented to veterans as an option for medical care, and not as a last resort.

Thank You

Zachary D. Walker