

Testimony of the Honorable David P. Roe, M.D.
Chairman, Committee on Veterans' Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
Before the Subcommittee on Health

“Legislative Hearing on: Draft legislation, the Veterans Affairs Medical Scribe Pilot Act of 2017; H.R. 91; H.R. 95; H.R. 467; H.R. 907; H.R. 918; H.R. 1005; H.R. 1162; H.R. 1545, and, H.R. 1662”

Wednesday, March 29, 2017, at 8:00 a.m.
334 Cannon House Office Building

It's a pleasure to join the Subcommittee on Health today to talk about my draft legislation to require VA to implement a pilot program for medical scribes within VA medical centers (VAMCs).

As a physician in private practice years ago, I took on the arduous task of converting from paper medical records to a million-dollar electronic health record system (EHR).

For me, it took time - lots of time - to get used to using the new electronic system.

As we all know, EHRs are extremely helpful tools for organizing and analyzing a patient's medical data and you would be hard-pressed to find a doctor's office or hospital today that doesn't use some form of EHR.

After my practice converted to an EHR, I eventually familiarized myself with it and it became a normal part of my practice.

However, I also learned that in order to fully utilize the new EHR, I had to divert my attention away from the patient and towards the computer screen. That never sat well with me, but it was what was needed - and what every practice was doing - to accommodate the new EHR technology.

Today, medical scribes are often used to assist clinicians by navigating and entering data into a patient's EHR, allowing the clinician to focus on the patient and not on the paperwork.

Medical scribes can improve efficiency in areas with a high demand of appointments but a low supply of providers -and can be especially helpful in high-paced areas of practice like an emergency department (ED) where every moment focused away from the patient could potentially lead to a tragic outcome.

Medical scribes are often recruited as undergraduates or recent graduates having an interest in entering into a medical career. For them, scribing provides an opportunity to glimpse first-hand what life in medicine is like and gain valuable experience for their future careers.

I wholeheartedly believe that veteran patients and VA providers alike could benefit from embracing medical scribes within VA medical facilities.

My draft bill would require the Secretary to implement a 2-year pilot program to establish positions for 40 scribes across 10 VAMCs, within the areas of emergency and specialty care.

This pilot seeks to improve both efficiency and, more importantly, the patient-doctor experience by allowing physicians to focus on their personal interactions with patients.

Under this draft legislation, VA would submit a report on the efficacy of the pilot every 180 days following its commencement and the Government Accountability Office would submit an independent report within 90 days of the conclusion of the pilot, to include a comparison of the pilot program with similar private sector programs.

The text of my legislation would prohibit any additional appropriations with which to carry out this pilot.

I am disappointed to see that VA's testimony is not supportive of my draft legislation and would note that VA's current Health Advocate pilot program is largely incongruent with the intent and scope of my draft legislation. Not only is VA's current program limited to primary care while my draft is exclusively for emergency and specialty care, but it also requires the scribe to take on the clinical role of "health coach", which brings a litany of licensure issues into question. Nonetheless, I look forward to working with the Department and with the members of this Subcommittee to address any outstanding concerns and move this legislation through regular order very quickly.

With that, I thank you for allowing me to be here today and yield back the balance of my time.