

SCTA Commemorates Telehealth Awareness Week

By Melanie Ferretti, Executive Assistant, Office of the State Director

On March 21, 2017, the South Carolina Telehealth Alliance (SCTA) held a press conference at the State House to commemorate Telehealth Awareness Week, which runs March 20 through March 24. The SCTA is a statewide collaboration of many organizations that have joined forces to expand telehealth services across South Carolina; the SCTA founders and major telehealth hubs include Greenville Health System, McLeod Health, MUSC Health, Palmetto Health, and the South Carolina Department of Mental Health (DMH). Community hospitals, local healthcare providers, and other community organizations are also part of SCTA. The partners share the belief that all South Carolinians should, and can, have access to quality healthcare provided with effectively managed costs.



SCTA Telehealth Awareness Week State House Press Conference Participants

Telehealth is the use of electronic information and telecommunications technologies to support long-distance clinical healthcare, patient and professional health-related education, public health, and health administration. Simply put, telehealth allows a person in one location to securely connect and interact with a healthcare professional in another location via video/computer technology. This is especially helpful for people living in rural areas who may not have access to qualified healthcare providers in their vicinity.

DMH State Director John H. Magill, the event moderator, read the Telehealth Awareness Week proclamation signed by Governor Henry McMaster. Magill is a proud partner of the Alliance and predicts clinical delivery of all health services will occur more and more through telehealth. “The future is unlimited for telehealth,” said Magill.

Three legislators, Senator Thomas Alexander, Representative Murrell Smith, and Representative Katherine "Katie" Arrington, and doctors representing Greenville Health System, McLeod Health, MUSC Health, and Palmetto Health, and patients who have used and benefitted from telehealth, all took part in the ceremony.

Senator Alexander, a champion and longtime supporter of telehealth, recognized and thanked Magill for his leadership in the creation and development of the DMH Telepsychiatry Program, a nationally recognized program.

To date, DMH has completed almost 33,000 telepsychiatry consults with patients in community hospital emergency departments. “Now we’ve expanded telehealth to other aspects of care. Telehealth is the wave of the future. It provides critical access to healthcare. Being from the mountains of Oconee County, a rural area of South Carolina, we understand the importance of having telehealth available throughout the state of South Carolina,” said Senator Alexander. “

It's also important to note the partnerships in the community the Telehealth Alliance has brought together. It's a great statement about the people of South Carolina, and so special that these groups have come together to work towards the common goal of improving not only access but the outcomes of better health. We are united. We are on the cutting edge and I look forward to the great strides we will take together in the future," he said.

Representative Smith expressed support of the State's investment in the innovative telehealth program and thanked the partners for what they have accomplished to improve healthcare in South Carolina.

Several patients shared their experiences with telehealth. One discussed *SmartExam*, a quick online care application for minor conditions offered by Palmetto Health. This smartphone application allows patients to log into the system, create an account, and send current health information and symptoms to a doctor for a diagnosis and recommended treatment. The patient said, "The entire process took about two hours and kept me from having to take time away from work and family. We all live busy lives. This app allowed me to continue my daily routine and receive a diagnosis and treatment recommendation without much disruption."

According to a mother whose child receives school-based telehealth services, it's important to her to know that her child can get the help he needs without missing classes and falling behind in his schoolwork. She appreciates the fact that she doesn't need to take time off from work to take her child to the doctor's office or emergency room. Via telehealth, her child is seen quickly and efficiently, and prescriptions, when needed, are called in to her local pharmacy so she can pick them up on her way home from work. All of this is done without sitting in an emergency department waiting room. Telehealth will definitely continue to be a part of their future.

Representative Arrington works with telehealth in the Department of Defense. She said, "It's our job as legislators to make health care as accessible as possible. Telehealth drives down the cost of health insurance and gives people immediate access to doctors. Telehealth will change our nation, and we need to have this in the state of South Carolina. We need it for senior communities where a telehealth pod can be proactive in improving the quality of life and extend life. We need telehealth in the Department of Corrections, where it could lower the high costs of transportation and security currently shouldered by taxpayers. Telehealth is the wave of the future. I applaud the members of the medical community and the Information Technology community that make telehealth possible."



SC Representative Katherine "Katie" Arrington at podium.

This is South Carolina's first celebration of Telehealth Awareness Week. With all of the measured advantages of telehealth, SCTA and others utilizing telehealth will continue to expand to effectively and efficiently meet the health needs of South Carolinians.