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TELEHEALTH: IMPACT ON THE STATE OF HEALTHCARE IN MISSISSIPPI

*David L. Powe, Ed.D.**

Today's healthcare industry offers an enormous economic development opportunity in Mississippi. The healthcare industry as a whole no longer simply refers to doctors, nurses, hospitals, and patients. Like all thriving industries, healthcare has embraced technological advances to the benefit of patients, hospital employees, and clinic workers everywhere. The industry now includes research and development, pharmaceuticals, high-tech machines, imaging devices, the companies that service them, and records/information networks and databases.

This growing industry has much to offer Mississippians. In a state with high rates of obesity, heart disease, diabetes, and hypertension, health care innovations and expanded healthcare access can save lives and reduce costs, making a significant difference in Mississippians' quality of life and long-term prosperity. In turn, healthcare corridors like that in Madison County, Mississippi, accompanied by the Madison County Economic Authority's Mississippi Bio-medical Business Collaboratory (MBBC) have created a dynamic environment, one fueled by research-based innovation and commitment to improved healthcare outcomes for Mississippians. This environment also serves as fertile ground for new healthcare businesses.

Located in Canton, the MBBC is designed to foster relationships, cooperation, and innovation among healthcare-related companies operating within the facility. The ultimate goal of the MBBC is to create sustainable, higher-paying healthcare and bio-medical jobs and grow the Madison County Healthcare Zone. The tenants within MBBC focus on providing advanced healthcare services, medical training and simulations, long-term care, IT asset management, pharmacy services, research and testing, and medical-equipment manufacturing.

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This article is written from the author's personal experience. In light of this and the author's expertise, this article does not conform to the traditional law review format.

This business model, though driven by the private sector, takes a public/private cooperative, blue-ocean approach to a healthcare-focused initiative. This is a unique approach to providing a positive business environment for biomedical companies.

Telemedicine is providing the public with greater healthcare access at a lower cost. When TelehealthOne began over a year ago, there were very few similar companies in Mississippi; today, there are over twenty. In our rural state and throughout the nation, many people do not use primary care; instead, they use the emergency rooms of local hospitals or self-administer treatment. By providing greater access to healthcare services, we predict that the demand for primary care physicians will grow and the population's healthcare indicators will improve.

Prediction is to compare telemedicine to the growth of the cellular telephone. Fifteen years ago, few large mobile phones were on the market. By April 2016, Apple had surpassed one billion in cell phone sales. Like cell phones, the medicine of the future will be highly personalized and with you 24/7, along with equipment like electronic screening, PhysioGlove¹, chairs that measure vital signs and oxygen saturation, and much more.

Short- and long-term legal challenges were presented when establishing the first homegrown telemedicine company in Mississippi; future efforts will be no exception. For example, a wide range of state-legislated and regulatory requirements must be met when providing the following services: walk-in clinics; corporate clinical services; school clinics; psychological testing and counseling; E-ICU; correctional care; Tele-ICU; long-term care services; teletherapy²; AssuranceOne³; and physician/NP, dermatological, and behavioral health services⁴.

For telemedicine in Mississippi, additional challenges are presented. Connectivity via fiber, copper, and broadband is necessary to reach rural areas in the state. Our legislatures must ensure that state laws and regulations provide greater access to patients while lowering the costs. Reimbursements for telemedicine should be similar to that offered for traditional services. Current inducements must be strengthened to grow the healthcare industry.

Despite these challenges, policymakers have the ability to improve the Telehealth environment in Mississippi. In addition to strengthening current state investment and support, possibilities include:

- A Business Investor Tax Credit, which gives investors a 25 percent tax credit up to \$50,000 on the value of their investments in healthcare companies, including early-stage start-ups;

1. A wire free, fully diagnostic, 12-lead electronic cardiogram.

2. Such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, and physical therapy.

3. A program that provides post-acute care to recovering patients.

4. Professionals in these areas diagnose health issues like cold and flu symptoms, allergies, ear infections, rashes, and skin problems. The more severe symptoms are referred to a physician or ER.

New state procurement policies and methods of giving preference to innovative young healthcare firms;⁵ and

Stronger support of private-sector innovation, like the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program, which offers R&D grants to small companies.⁶

5. J.D. Harrison, *Small business contracting numbers inflated by errors and exclusions, data show*, THE WASHINGTON POST: ON SMALL BUSINESS, (July 29, 2013), https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/on-small-business/small-business-contracting-numbers-inflated-by-errors-and-exclusions-data-show/2013/07/28/7fa2a4fc-f2f6-11e2-8505-bf6f231e77b4_story.html.

6. J.D. Harrison, *Lawmakers strike deal to reauthorize, enhance small business research programs*, THE WASHINGTON POST: ON SMALL BUSINESS, (Dec. 12, 2011), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/on-small-business/post/lawmakers-strike-deal-to-reauthorize-enhance-small-biz-research-programs.html>.