

Health Information Compliance Alert

News in brief: Telemedicine's Popularity Soars -- and Could Save Billions

Sales of telemedicine services and products are projected to exceed \$1.8 billion by 2013.

Access to healthcare is the buzzphrase these days, and telehealth as an option is gaining momentum. "Telehealth is increasing access to much needed specialists. It is becoming an affordable alternative that demonstrates savings. As a result, its use is growing," said the Health Research Institute of PricewaterhouseCoopers in a recently released report *Jammed Access: Widening the*

Front Door to Healthcare.

Sales of telemedicine services and products are projected to exceed \$1.8 billion by 2013, up from just \$77 million in 1995, according to the report.

Telehealth includes the use of medical information exchanged from one site to another via electronic communications such as videoconferencing, transmission of still images, e-health including patient portals, and remote monitoring of vital signs.

Savings: Savings is the foremost benefit of telehealth/telemedicine. Based on estimates of the AT&T Center for Telehealth Research and Policy, widespread implementation of telehealth could save the healthcare system more than \$4 billion by merely reducing transfers of patients from one location to another for medical exams.

The applications of telehealth are wide-ranging too, from disease prevention to palliative care. "Home technologies work especially well to manage patients with chronic diseases," said **Adam Darkins, MD**, chief consultant of care coordination for the Veterans Health Administration's Office of Patient Care Services.

And with the government's recent talk about monitoring acute hospital readmissions, telehealth may be just the ticket to keep things under control. "The VA can monitor these patients so if they begin to deteriorate, you can call them at home or see them in the clinic with the aim of treating them and avoiding their unnecessary admission to the hospital," Darkins added.

Admit reducer: The VA's national home telehealth program showed a 25 percent reduction in numbers of inpatient days and a 19 percent reduction in hospital admissions.

"Telemedicine is an investment. Ten years from now, the healthcare decision makers will demand technology because the upcoming generations are increasingly technologydriven and also because this technology overcomes age-old barriers to care delivery," said **Jennifer Baron**, director of Clarian Telemedicine, who was quoted in the report.