

Opening Statement  
Chairman Bill Frist  
Subcommittee on Science, Technology, and Space  
Hearing on Telemedicine Technologies  
September 15, 1999

- Good afternoon. Today's hearing on telemedicine technologies is the heart of my personal curiosity and professional expertise -- the cross-section between medicine, and emerging technological innovation. Our purpose here this afternoon is to explore the technological barriers to telemedicine and to educate ourselves about the core principles that surround this growing, multi-disciplinary field. I hope that our speakers will illustrate some of the current obstacles facing telemedicine including:
  - challenges to the its technological development;
  - challenges to the application of the technologies; and
  - unexpected challenges in areas such as privacy and psychology
- Throughout the course of this hearing today, we are going to hear about activities that take place across the spectrum of innovation: from the creation of technology to its application. More importantly, we will hear from scientists and administrators who are driving these technologies in predominately rural communities, where access to quality or specialized care is often out of reach.
- Perhaps the greatest impact of telemedicine will be on the 25 percent of the United States population who live in rural areas or "health-shortage areas." These are the citizens who have the most to gain by telemedicine -- people who must drive for hundreds of miles to metropolitan health care centers just to see a doctor. Or the elderly, who require in-home care for regular check-ups but do not have the ability to see a physician in his or her office. Telemedicine can lower medical costs through remote patient monitoring or consultations by an estimated \$36 million per year. **It can revolutionize our entire health care industry by providing a new way to deliver existing medical or health care services.**
- But first we must consider the barriers that I just highlighted. There are technical, as well as administrative aspects to the development and application of the technology in the field of medicine.
- As a researcher in immunology, I understand the numerous challenges posed by the creation of new technology. These efforts involve long hours working on innovative approaches that often lead to a dead end.
- As a transplant surgeon, I know the challenges inherent in the application of new technology. (Offer first-hand experience about the introduction of lasers in surgical transplant procedures)
- Throughout the hearing today there are questions that we should all bear in mind:

- What are the various challenges posed by this new technology: not only technical barriers, but also issues of medical privacy, and reimbursements for services?
- What are the legal impacts? Issues of licensing and liability are true obstacles to overcome.
  
- Of course we also need to ask ourselves about the proper role of government in this evolving field. The government's role should not be static: it must change during the life cycle and in response to the application of the technology. At different points the proper role may be to nurture -- at others, it may serve technology and patients best by getting out of the way.
  
- In closing, I would like to reiterate one final point: telemedicine does not create new or different health care services. It simply provides a revolutionary way to deliver existing medical or health care services. Our goal today is to learn as much as possible about the technologies of telemedicine so that we can begin to make the right public policy choices for the future and bring specialized and quality care to every American, regardless of where they live.