

OPINION

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TELEMEDICINE



Allow physicians to treat patients wherever they are

If you use any technology to contact your doctor remotely, you might be surprised to know that your physician may be unknowingly committing a crime, especially if you live near a state line. These laws are rarely enforced and were waived during the COVID-19 pandemic. A bill introduced



L. KENNETH ZWEIG

during this year's Virginia General Assembly would have made it easier for physicians to practice telemedicine beyond Virginia's borders, but unfortunately, it gained no traction.

Physicians like me are typically licensed only in the state in which they practice, and therefore, they are allowed to provide care only within that state's borders. If you contact your physician while outside the state in which he or she is licensed, your physician is not legally allowed to provide you with any care or recommendations.

With the widespread adoption of telemedicine during COVID-19, this is becoming much more of an issue in health care, particularly in Virginia, because it impacts physician reimbursement and liability. Patients and clinicians alike have found telemedicine to be an effective way to address many medical conditions, and a great option for disabled patients or patients living in rural areas where physically going to an office is difficult. Over the past three years, telemedicine has become a standard practice among medical providers. Over one-third of medical visits in 2022 were done by telemedicine.

During the COVID-19 health care emergency declaration, interstate practicing laws were waived, and physicians and other health care providers were allowed to provide telemedicine across state lines. Now, many states are lifting the public health emergency declaration, which will reinstate the laws restricting interstate practice. As a result, many providers are veering away from

telemedicine again to avoid legal and malpractice pitfalls. Virginia has already declared that the public health emergency will end May 11, and with it the protections for providers who care for patients outside of their jurisdiction.

A growing group of states has forecast the issues that would be caused by again limiting interstate medical care. They have joined an entity called the Interstate Medical Licensure Compact, an agreement among states to allow medical providers licensed within one member state to provide care in any of the member states. Currently, 37 states belong to this compact, but not Virginia. Legislation was introduced in Virginia's House of Delegates in January to join the IMLC, but the bill was left in committee.

Unless Virginia acts quickly and joins the IMLC, after May 11, health care in the state will revert back to the arcane laws established long before video telemedicine became such a viable and crucial part of health care. A patient who lives in Bristol, Tennessee, but sees a physician in Blacksburg, Virginia, because of his work site will not legally be able to call his physician on a night or weekend from home if he gets sick. A disabled person who lives near the Outer Banks in North Carolina will not be able to contact her specialist in Norfolk unless she travels in person. As a physician, I will not be allowed to provide advice regarding abnormal test results to my patient visiting her family in another state.

Medical conditions are the same across state lines, so why shouldn't medical care be the same? Legislators in 37 states recognize the importance of getting care from a doctor who knows you and whom you trust, regardless of location. Virginia legislators should follow suit and join the IMLC for the health and continuing care of Virginians, wherever they are.

Dr. L. Kenneth Zweig is an internist at Northern Virginia Family Practice in Alexandria. His email is kzweig@nvafamilypractice.com.

Letters policy

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NATIONAL HOSPITAL WEEK



Sara Morris, a nurse at Sentara Martha Jefferson Hospital, wears a mask.

SENTARA MARTHA JEFFERSON HOSPITAL FOUNDATION

Dedication continues to serve community

RITA BUNCH

As we celebrate National Hospital Week, I'd like to take a moment to share my immense gratitude for the people who power this hospital and compassionately care for our patients every day – our team of dedicated nurses, doctors, support staff, safety and administrative professionals, and so many more. Our community is truly a better place because of their commitment and service.

I have had the pleasure of leading the Sentara Martha Jefferson Hospital team for over a year now, and each day I see firsthand the deep dedication every team member shows. And as we look to the future together, I am excited to share some news about our collective efforts to respond to the needs of the community by evolving our services and making critical healthcare resources more accessible.

To start, we recently expanded our regional impact by opening the Sentara Martha Jefferson Outpatient Care Center at 920 East High Street in Charlottesville. The new clinic was built to offer quick, convenient care for community members in one

centralized location, offering a wide variety of services, such as imaging, laboratory services and an infusion center in the heart of town. Our Sentara Medical Group colleagues are also expanding in the region, welcoming two new pulmonologists and a new orthopedic surgeon to the team this summer, as well as growing the robotic surgery program here in our community.

In addition, we are collaborating with UVA Children's to establish a new outpatient Pediatric Neurodevelopmental and Behavioral Health Care clinic in Albemarle County. This collaboration is based on an innovative model bringing together developmental pediatricians, pediatric psychologists, child psychiatrists and integrative medicine specialists. We are excited to leverage our strengths as a community hospital alongside UVA Children's research and learning capabilities to provide local families the support they need.

Further, in keeping with our system-wide commitment to address social determinants of health, we have announced a leading investment in the Local Food hub. This expansion of our

current partnership will host 14 free food stands through October throughout Louisa, Greene, Albemarle, Fluvanna and Nelson counties, supplying more than 1,700 families with local farm-fresh produce such as healthy meats, fruits, and vegetables.

Without our team, these partnerships and the accompanying positive community impact would not be possible. While the last few years have been full of new challenges, especially for our healthcare workforce, one constant is our team's devotion to the care of our patients, their families and this community. The recognitions our hospital has received, from Sentara Martha Jefferson Hospital being recognized as one of the best in the nation for maternity care by U.S. News and World Report to receiving Healthgrades's Outstanding Patient Experience Award, are a true testament to this dedication and their impact on our community. Today and every day, I am thankful for and proud of this team, and I hope you will join me in celebrating them this Hospital Week.

Rita Bunch is the president of Sentara Martha Jefferson Hospital.

TO THE EDITOR

Renaming schools also confuses voters

The recent push from the Charlottesville City Schools to rename many of their buildings comes at a time when the city government is also revising the boundaries for the voting precincts in Charlottesville.

When council recently approved the polling restructure, almost half the voters in Charlottesville will be affected, including two polling places being changed from their original location. Polls at Tonsler Recreation Center and Alumni Hall are being replaced by Jackson-Via Elementary and Charlottesville High School.

The current changes in school names coupled with the new polling locations could lower voter turnout by creating confusion as well as making unnecessary barriers for voters who feel that the multiple changes all at once are too overwhelming and may ultimately forego their civic duty.

In all, seven of the nine precincts are going to be held at local Charlottesville City Schools that continue to be voted on to change their names. Currently, the Venable and Clark precincts would now be at Trailblazers and Summit. Johnson could become Cherry Avenue, which is also confusing as Cherry Avenue Christian Church was a polling place years ago and the Buford precinct is also on the same road.

If the local government officials who are making the decisions want to be reelected, I feel it is in their best interest to not try and disenfranchise their constituents with unnecessary renaming of our schools, but to assure voters know where to cast their vote as elections are approaching quickly.

Derek Madeira Hartline
Charlottesville

City parks need more help

One of the primary treasures of

our city is our parks system. I believe there is no finer system anywhere for a city the size of ours. We are so fortunate to have beautiful green spaces that contribute in so many ways to the benefit of our community. The physical and mental health of all, the fostering of social connections and community, the benefits to the natural environment, and the economic benefits to the city. But our City Parks and Recreation Department provides so much more than parks and trails including maintenance of the Downtown Mall, beautiful flowers everywhere, the cemeteries, the rec centers, the swimming pools, the city market, youth summer camps, sports leagues, golf courses, and more. All of which contribute greatly to a better quality of life for all of Charlottesville.

Costs to the Parks Department have increased exponentially, as has everything, in recent years for both maintenance and capital improvement projects, many of which are necessarily on hold. The city budget cannot keep up with the fiscal needs of the department due to other spending priorities. This situation is not unique to Charlottesville. But our wonderful park system, and the other offerings, is in danger of falling behind regarding maintenance. Badly needed capital improvements may need to be shelved.

I am proposing that we need a non-profit organization, called "Friends of Charlottesville Parks." Many other cities and the national parks have such organizations which raise private funds to supplement the monies allocated by city and federal governments. I believe that such an undertaking is the only way to guarantee the vitality of our park system.

Jeffrey Fracher
Charlottesville

More permanent memorial needed

One chilly day last November,

life at the University of Virginia took on a vastly different meaning when the lives of three students were taken. The Beta Bridge was painted with the words, "Forever in Our Hearts." Its concrete surface was covered with personal notes conveying affection, sorrow, and solace. On its other side "UVA Strong" appeared with the jersey numbers 1, 15, 41 worn by D'Sean Perry, Devin Chandler and Lavel Davis, Jr. Three rocks bearing the young men's names lay at the entrance to the garage near where the tragedy occurred. Displayed within the glass walls of the Culbreth Theatre vestibule were large photos of these young men, their images capturing a moment that will remain frozen in time.

We recently read that UVA president Jim Ryan ran in the Boston Marathon in honor of D'Sean Perry, Devin Chandler and Lavel Davis, Jr. They were recently honored by the NFL. UVA sports have emblazoned these player's numbers on all athlete's uniforms with "UVA Strong" appearing on their warm-up shirts.

A pile of dried pine branches sits at the bottom of the lawn at Culbreth. It's all that's left of a wooden memorial that once held three wreaths. Eventually, the heartfelt messages on the wall of Beta Bridge will be repainted, as with other poignant, bittersweet memorials of the past...Hoos for Hokies, Humayun Khan-Brave Hero, Bring Hannah Home, One Love, and Otto, Hoos Are With You.

How can the lives of these young men truly make UVA strong? Their stories shouldn't end with a random act of violence, but with a memorial to reflect their collective attributes of determination, creativity, humility, and devotion. Their lives should be remembered by creating a permanent work of art dedicated to their memory on the lawn of the Culbreth Theatre.

Susan Lanterman
Charlottesville