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State Medical Boards Adopt Policy Guidelines for Safe Practice of Telemedicine

Denver, Colorado (April 26, 2014) – Representatives of state medical licensing boards today approved updated guidelines to help ensure the safety and quality of medicine when it is practiced using telemedicine technology – which can connect a patient in one location with a care provider in another location.

The *Model Policy on the Appropriate Use of Telemedicine Technologies in the Practice of Medicine*, adopted by the Federation of State Medical Boards (FSMB), provides much-needed guidance and a basic roadmap that state boards can use to ensure that patients are protected from harm in a fast-changing health-care delivery environment.

Among its key provisions, the model policy states that the same standards of care that have historically protected patients during in-person medical encounters must apply to medical care delivered electronically. Care providers using telemedicine must establish a credible “patient-physician relationship,” ensuring that patients are properly evaluated and treated and that providers adhere to well-established principles guiding privacy and security of personal health information, informed consent, safe prescribing and other key areas of medical practice.

“Telemedicine offers wonderful tools to help expand treatment options for patients – particularly in helping provide care in remote areas, lowering costs and helping support preventive care efforts,” said FSMB President and CEO Humayun J. Chaudhry, DO, MACP. “But as telemedicine has grown, so too, has the need for clear, common-sense guidelines that help health care providers transition to this exciting new environment in a safe way.”

Dr. Chaudhry noted that the new guidelines are designed to provide flexibility in the use of technology by physicians – ranging from telephone and email interactions to videoconferencing – as long as they adhere to widely recognized standards of patient care.

The policy adopted by the FSMB's House of Delegates, which represents all of the nation's 70 state and territorial state medical licensing boards, is advisory, meaning state boards are free to adopt it as is, modify it, or retain their own current policies regarding telemedicine.

Representatives of the telemedicine industry expressed support for the guidelines following their adoption on Saturday.

"CTEL appreciates the FSMB's guideline efforts as a first step to help put a definition to safe telemedicine," said Greg Billings, Executive Director of the Robert J. Waters Center for Telehealth and e-Health Law (CTEL), which represents some of the nation's leading telemedicine providers.

The Policy at a Glance:

- Standards of care that protect patients during in-person medical interactions apply equally to medical care delivered electronically
- Providers using telemedicine should establish a credible "patient-physician relationship" and ensure that their patients are properly evaluated and treated
- Providers should adhere to well-established principles guiding privacy and security of records, informed consent, safe prescribing and other key areas of medical practice.

The new policy is available at www.fsmb.org/pdf/FSMB_Telemedicine_Policy.pdf. For more information, please contact Drew Carlson at dcarlson@fsmb.org or (817) 868-4043.