

My name is Margot, I use tele health in my work as a companion animal general practitioner every day. Telephone calls, emails, and texts are exchanged every day across practices in Rhode Island to help clients and their pets avoid the expense and stress of a visit, but most often, to free up appointments for patients that cannot be triaged over the phone. These services are frequently offered free of charge.

While telehealth after an in person visit is routinely in use, telemedicine without an in person visit, as this bill intends, is a different story. The advantages of an in person visit with a physical exam cannot be over emphasized. Our veterinary patients do not communicate, the majority of our clients pay for services out of pocket, and the standard of care in veterinary is often a “spectrum of care”. Spectrum of care is a range of veterinary care options (both diagnostic and treatments) that can be provided based on the unique circumstances of each case. Telemedicine, as this legislation permits, cannot offer a spectrum of care, it cannot offer diagnostics, it can only offer treatments, often in the form of antibiotics. When telemedicine, run by companies whose goal is to sell medications, increases the inappropriate use of antibiotics we will all pay, as a society, in the face of the very real struggle against antimicrobial resistance.

The underlying assumption that telemedicine without a prior in person exam is a safe option for pets and their owners is specious. There are a myriad of examples only one of which I will touch on today:

1. An ear infection in a dog, on the outset, seems like a straightforward telehealth problem. Unfortunately, due to the complex microbiota in the ears of dogs, there are many different types of ear infections. Some of which require antibiotics, some of

which don't. Inappropriate prescription of an antibiotic when an antifungal was indicated can result in:

- a. Treatment failure requiring followup visits
- b. Worsening of clinical signs resulting in middle or inner ear infections
- c. Will further drive antimicrobial resistance

In my relatively short veterinary career I personally have spent countless hours volunteering across many different organizations, all with the goal of helping patients and clients access veterinary care. I care about this issue deeply and want to see expanded access to affordable veterinary care not just in Rhode Island but across this country. As a professional working in the field, I do not see telemedicine as the solution we are looking for, I see that goal is achievable by much safer means including:

1. Funding scholarships for veterinarians and veterinary technicians to help more people achieve their goals of working in the field without taking on crippling student debt
2. State sponsored/supported veterinary clinics for routine and emergency care
3. Ongoing and continued support of the RIVMA Companion Animal Fund or related privately funded organizations which have helped countless eligible Rhode Islanders help pay for the cost of veterinary care for their beloved pets.

Thank you for taking your time to listen, I am willing to discuss further examples or answer any questions you may have as long as I am able to.