



Improving Access to Quality Healthcare Through Technological Innovation

Pennsylvania Senate Republican Policy Committee

March 19, 2025

On behalf of The Guthrie Clinic, I would like to thank the Pennsylvania Senate Republican Policy Committee for allowing me to speak at today's hearing on improving access to quality healthcare through technological innovation.

I am honored to join you in discussing this important and timely topic.

My name is Dr. Ed Sabanegh, and I am President and CEO of The Guthrie Clinic, which was one of the first multispecialty group practices in the country, established in Sayre, Pennsylvania over a century ago. We have always been early adopters of innovative tools and were one of the first health systems to use Epic, the best-in-class electronic medical record system. I am very proud of the fact that Guthrie has been awarded Epic's 10-star designation for optimizing the system; we are one of just three global customers to achieve this five years in a row.

Today, Guthrie has grown to 10,000 employees who provide care to patients over 10,000 square miles and 14 counties in Pennsylvania and New York, offering a full spectrum of services to nearly 2 million patient visits each year.

Support Enhanced Care Through Innovation

Like many health systems across the nation and in the Commonwealth, Guthrie has experienced workforce shortages and financial constraints. To address this and ensure sustainable access to high-quality care, we have pushed ourselves to think creatively and embrace innovative solutions.

In 2023, we launched the Guthrie Pulse Center, a transformative care delivery platform that leverages support from highly trained round-the-clock Guthrie-employed remote health care professionals, allowing our care teams at the bedside to focus more on patients and less on administrative tasks, such as documenting patient histories and managing medications. Through this model, each nurse is spending about 20 minutes less per shift in

patient charts, resulting in less time in front of the computer and more time in front of the patient.

Also housed in the Pulse Center, our system bed coordination program launched in April 2024, and since then, average emergency department hold times have decreased by 86 minutes. In addition, Intensive Care Unit (ICU) stays have been reduced by a half day. This means that patients are waiting less time to get the care they need, allowing them to get home sooner.

We use in-room computers, high-quality video cameras, and audio monitors to transmit data, including vital signs, test results, and imaging exams, from the bedside to the Pulse Center. To be clear, these virtual team members are not replacing those at the bedside; they are supporting them as part of the care team.

Since our virtual nurses are required to be licensed in Pennsylvania and have at least five years of bedside experience, they act as mentors for those who are less experienced, quickly answering questions and offering guidance. They also provide extra layers of observation, helping to detect potential issues early and allowing their colleagues to act quickly. As an example, we had a remote nurse who, while observing a patient's declining vitals, detected a pulmonary embolism and quickly arranged for emergency care, most likely saving the patient's life. Every day through this model, we mitigate fall risks, minimize harm, and swiftly identify changes in patient conditions.

This is innovative technology at its finest, and it's one of the reasons why we were named a Top Innovator by Modern Healthcare in 2023, one of only 10 honorees in the U.S.

As legislators look to improve health care quality and support innovation, I would suggest that models like ours be protected and qualifications and guidelines be established so that every patient in Pennsylvania receives quality care from trained professionals, whether it's in person or virtual. What we do not want to see happen is patient safety, quality of care, and the credibility of virtual services compromised by providers who lack the proper training and credentials. We also do not want to see virtual services replace bedside resources.

Champion Pioneering Solutions

At our long-term care facility in Towanda, Guthrie has deployed new technology that enables us to provide a higher level of care for our patients.

Through a small, contactless device, data is automatically uploaded to integrated platforms and trends are monitored, allowing us to prevent patients from deteriorating and needing to go to the emergency department for advanced care.

As an example, many of our long-term care patients are bed bound, meaning they are at risk of developing pressure ulcers on their backside. To prevent this, our team assists the patient with movement at prescribed times. By leveraging technology, we can now measure the frequency and quality of the movement, ensuring the highest level of care possible is consistently being delivered.

At Guthrie, we will continue to support programs, proposals, and policies that foster innovation and the integration of technology to enable high-quality patient care and improve outcomes. Failure to prioritize these efforts will result in stagnation and widening disparities. To continue meeting the evolving needs of patients, we must invest in digital health solutions, support research and development, and promote partnerships that advance care coordination, efficiency, and outcomes.

Invest in Mobile Health Infrastructure

In rural communities, like the ones served by Guthrie, residents often face significant barriers to care, including a provider shortage, limited access to transportation, and a lack of broadband infrastructure.

To bridge the gap, Guthrie has deployed several mobile clinics with focus on dental care and mammograms. Last week, we launched our Maternity Oasis Mobile (MOM) Unit, which will be providing comprehensive care to women throughout the region with services that include prenatal/postpartum care, ultrasounds, fetal monitoring, mental health counseling, and breastfeeding support. The increased access that we're providing helps to ensure that rural residents receive preventative care, timely screenings, and vital support.

As I mentioned, Guthrie is considered best in class for electronic medical record (EMR) usage- and this is no different on the road. Through using our EMR, providers can perform necessary tasks, like updating charts and reviewing images, right from the mobile unit. It sounds simple, but if we didn't have an established connection and access to the EMR in the units, we wouldn't be able to provide this lifeline to so many of the communities we care for.

We propose that Pennsylvania invest in mobile health infrastructure through a dedicated funding stream; by bringing care directly to those in need, we can innovatively reduce preventable complications, improve patient outcomes, and support underserved communities.

Thank you again for allowing Guthrie to provide testimony on this topic. We welcome the opportunity to act as a resource and are happy to answer any questions.