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Missouri Working to Utilize Health-care Technology to Improve Health and Reduce Costs

One of the top priorities of this year's legislative session is improving health care in Missouri. One of the best ways to do this is to dramatically increase the efficiency and effectiveness of health-care technology. Our antiquated health-care system is not only inconvenient, it also endangers lives. That is why lawmakers have been working to implement new policies investing in health-care technology and bringing it into the 21st century.

The most pressing reason health-care providers should be taking advantage of advanced technology is that our current paper-based system is prone to errors. An Institute of Medicine report notes that thousands of people die each year due to mistakes on paper records. Quite simply, paper kills. This record is unacceptable.

Technological advancements will not only save lives, they will also improve health services for all Missourians. By making health-care information more accessible to providers, consumers and public agencies, all sides can make more informed health-care decisions. This will improve the health of Missourians and lower costs for consumers and taxpayers.

There are several technologies currently in use that need to be more widely employed in our state. Teleconferencing can be better used to improve communications between doctors and patients. Telemonitoring allows doctors to remotely monitor patients' vital signs, which significantly reduces emergency room visits. In addition, utilizing standard electronic record-keeping will give doctors access to patients' medical histories from anywhere in the state.

In recent years, the Legislature has taken steps to improve health-care technology. Last year, lawmakers approved the governor's plan to provide $25 million to the Missouri Healthcare Technology Fund. The budget currently under consideration contains another $5 million to implement the Health Care Information Technology Initiative. In addition, the new MO HealthNet program will replace our overburdened, paper-based Medicaid program.

These are just preliminary steps. At this stage in history, it is unacceptable that a Jiffy Lube station is more advanced than health care in our state. Utilizing electronic medical records and telemonitoring will save lives, improve health and reduce costs for all involved.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by e-mail at matt_bartle@senate.mo.gov or by phone at (888) 711-9278.

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