

Cato Institute encourages interstate, international licensing for telemedicine

By Akanksha Jayanthi

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As the Internet allows for greater connectivity, the healthcare industry should shift to embrace the opportunities it provides, such as telemedicine, instead of keeping care contained by borders, argues Simon Lester, a trade policy analyst with libertarian think tank Cato Institute.

Mr. Lester wrote a policy analysis outlining the benefits of "expanding trade" in healthcare by using telemedicine. Currently, regulations constrain the use and spread of telemedicine, as licensing requirements confine physicians to only practice within their state's borders. This policy analysis joins the ranks of the American Telemedicine Association and the Federation of State Medical Boards, all of which are trying to make it easier for physicians to practice medicine across state lines.

Additionally, Mr. Lester addressed the potential benefits of international telehealth care.

For example, "if it's 3:00 a.m., and your young child is throwing up, you may not want to take him to the emergency room just yet, but some advice on the seriousness of the problem would be helpful. Rather than contact a sleep-deprived American doctor, why not Skype with an Australian doctor who is in the middle of a regular shift?" Mr. Lester wrote.

The market for telemedicine is growing, and more physicians and third-party vendors are offering telemedicine services, though are bound by geopolitical borders.

"With doctors and nurses providing medical advice online, the idea that their advice can or should be restricted to people within their borders seems arbitrary," Mr. Lester wrote. "Concerns about quality of care can be addressed through licensing and qualification requirements, which are firmly entrenched already in this profession."