

## LAWMAKERS SAY TELEMEDICINE DEAL LIKELY THIS YEAR

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THE CAPITAL, TALLAHASSEE, February 3, 2015.....Pointing to a need to increase access to health care in areas such as rural communities, a bipartisan group of House and Senate leaders Tuesday expressed confidence they will reach agreement this year on a plan to boost the use of telemedicine in Florida.

"It's abundantly important that we get it done and get it done right," House Health Care Appropriations Chairman Matt Hudson, R-Naples, said during a news conference at the Capitol.

Sometimes called "telehealth," telemedicine involves using the Internet and other technology to provide care to patients remotely. As a basic example, a physician could use a video link to consult with a patient who is at home.

While some providers such as hospitals have started moving forward with telemedicine, Senate Health Policy Chairman Aaron Bean, R-Fernandina Beach, and House Health & Human Services Chairman Jason Brodeur, R-Sanford, said lawmakers need to put guidelines in state law.

For instance, Bean said such a law would allow Florida's Medicaid system to pay for care through telemedicine, something it cannot do now. Brodeur also said a law could provide legal "certainty" about telemedicine, which is an issue that touches on various parts of the health-care industry, including doctors, hospitals and insurers.

Lawmakers during the past few years have filed telemedicine bills, but the House and Senate have not been able to reach agreement. Differing bills have been filed for the upcoming 2015 session, with Bean and Senate Minority Leader Arthenia Joyner, D-Tampa, proposing one measure (SB 478), and Rep. Travis Cummings, R-Orange Park, proposing another (HB 545).

But during the news conference Tuesday, leaders said they expect to work out differences on regulatory issues that have led to past disagreements. One of the key regulatory issues in the past has been about whether out-of-state physicians should be allowed to provide telemedicine to patients in Florida.

Bean and Brodeur said an agreement has been reached to require such health-care providers to be licensed in Florida if they provide telemedicine in the state and also to prevent them from practicing outside their areas of specialty --- an issue known in the industry as scope of practice. Florida physicians would be able to use telemedicine to consult with out-of-state doctors.

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