Providing Rural Patients Home Town Care through Mobile Sonographers
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Overview
The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) is actively working to help rural providers secure and manage reimbursement for remote health services. UAMS’ Center for Distance Health (CDH) sends sonographers to rural areas of the state to perform ultrasounds on high-risk pregnant women and train local sonographers to perform high-level targeted ultrasound, which allows the patient to receive treatment in her community without traveling to a metropolitan area for specialty treatment from one of the very few Maternal Fetal Medicine Specialists in Arkansas.

Process
The images and/or videos provided by the sonographers are either stored-and-forwarded to a specialist or the images are viewed in real time if the rural facility has a picture archiving and communication system (PACS).

In order to reap full benefits from such an arrangement, the CDH provides management of the reimbursement system by first developing a contract with the oulying facility that allows the sonographer to work under one of the rural physicians. Within the contract, the CDH negotiates a payment mechanism, which hinges mainly on the availability of the telemedicine equipment, which could be provided by the CDH if not readily accessible at the rural facility.

By providing these sonography services to rural high-risk pregnant women, the CDH receives a portion of the reimbursement, and the rural facility receives at least some of the reimbursement, whereas it would not if the patient had traveled to an urban clinic or hospital for specialty treatment. Most importantly, the patient is able to stay near home yet receive the specialty care she and her baby require.