

March 17, 2021

After being diagnosed with stage IV colon cancer in March 2020, I have been undergoing chemotherapy through traditional oncology for the past year. Knowing that surgery to remove the cancer is the most effective way to achieve “no evidence of disease” status, my husband and I started asking about surgical options about six months into our treatment. However, despite a good scan that showed dramatic improvement in September 2020, the local surgeons we approached were unwilling to operate on me based on risk factors stemming from my original diagnosis. This ruled out the University of Kansas Health System, Olathe Health and Advent Health.

I am part of a Facebook support group for colon cancer patients, and a number of them recommended and have used a surgeon in California named Dr. Yuman Fong. So my husband and I reached out to him and were able to connect with him via telemed in December 2020.

Based on my scans from September (the same ones that were given to the local surgeons), Dr. Fong said he would be able to operate and had a high degree of confidence that he would be successful in removing the cancer. However, a scan the following week revealed that between September and December, I had experienced regrowth in my cancer, and we decided to try more chemo before attempting surgery.

Through all of this and up until now, we have been able to consult with Dr. Fong through telemed. We haven't had to jeopardize my health by having to travel to California to consult with him directly. Having a compromised immune system makes traveling risky—with or without COVID, but certainly with it.

What we didn't realize until last week was that we were only being enabled to conduct telemed appointments because there was a COVID executive order in place. Thus, when Dr. Fong called me on March 8<sup>th</sup> and told me Kansas was going to stop allowing telemed appointments, I panicked. Here was the only doctor we had met thus far who was willing to perform potentially life-saving surgery on me, and I was going to be cut off from speaking to him without going to California.

Immediately, my husband and I began contacting lawmakers. Both our state and federal legislators were very helpful in getting to the bottom of the issue. We were able to connect Dr. Fong's office with the Kansas Board of Healing Arts, which is (hopefully) helping him get set up with a temporary extension to continue telemed until this bill passes to make it a permanent option.

I want to write and urge you to pass this legislation and to do so before the executive order expires on March 31. People in need of the kind of care that can only be found out-of-state shouldn't have to endanger themselves by getting on a plane and being exposed to viruses and germs. Not when technology exists that makes it possible for them to have the same appointments in the safety of their own homes.

In my case, no one that we have found in the state of Kansas is willing to do the surgery that could potentially save my life. Thus, out-of-state care is necessary. And so far, telemed has made it possible for me to avoid traveling and risking further health complications.

Please pass HB 2208. I'm a wife and a mom to a sweet 2.5-year-old son, both of whom I am fighting desperately to stay alive for. And I'm sure there are others in Kansas in similar shoes. Please don't let legislation preventing telemed be the reason we aren't here for the ones we love.

Thank you.

Sincerely,  
Jill Lee