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Good morning Chairman Casey, Ranking Member Scott, and Distinguished Panel.

Thank you for inviting me to speak to the Senate Aging Committee about my experience with telehealth and the VA.

You can probably tell I am not a native of South Carolina. I spent most of my life up North before moving here 7 years ago.

There are a lot of good reasons to live in South Carolina. I moved here to be close to my son, daughter-in-law, and granddaughter, who is now 10 years old. I have the pleasure of helping to take care of her a few days a week.

When I moved to South Carolina in 2015, South Carolina Veterans welcomed me. I was invited to the Port of Charleston for the commissioning ceremony for the USS Ralph Johnson, a guided missile destroyer named after a Marine from South Carolina who posthumously received the Medal of Honor for his heroic actions during the Vietnam War.

Ralph Johnson used his body to shield two fellow Marines from a grenade, absorbing the blast and dying instantly. I am wearing this baseball cap today in his honor.

South Carolina Veterans recommended that I check into the VA. I've been with the Charleston VA since 2016.

What I did not expect before I moved here was the excellent healthcare I would get at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Health Center, which is also named after that same heroic Marine.

A couple of years ago, the VA invited me to sign up for telehealth, and I was skeptical.

I have lots of severe medical problems.

But I never signed up for VA health care before 2016 because I thought it was for veterans who were hurt and maimed in Vietnam and other wars. I figured they needed it more than I did.

I served in the U.S. Navy during the Vietnam War, but most of my active service was in Japan, where I served as a communications technician. A highlight was attending a performance by Bob Hope.

After being honorably discharged from the Navy, I eventually ended up in Montpelier, Vermont, where I worked in information technology.

I also served as a volunteer EMT for about a decade in Fire and Rescue. In those days, all we had was bottled oxygen to keep people going until the ambulance arrived. We did not have all the modern technology they have these days.

Sometimes the ambulance got lost on the back roads of rural Vermont. I guess it was tough to navigate when the cows moved.

With telehealth, the VA can manage my complex chronic conditions very well.

The VA assigned me a telehealth case manager - what a pleasure. Mine is an RN with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing who knows her stuff. Her name is Frances Santana.

I thought that they were all Vets, but not all of them are, and they always say, "Thanks for your service."

The Ralph Johnson VA Health Center is a teaching hospital, so some of the Docs are from the Medical University of South Carolina, so you get the best, smartest medical staff to be found.

A function of telehealth is that they watch after you. I send my vitals to my RN daily and if there is a problem you get a call immediately.

She has direct contact with Docs, fellow RNs, and other providers and will get answers to your problems or education for you on medicine and procedures; she gets problems resolved for you.

A big plus at the VA is that one computer system is looked at by all, including Docs, RNs, and medical staff. When you have an appointment, your provider has all the necessary information.

I have many decades of experience as a computer programmer from the early days of the industry. It's so important to have computers fully and properly used to benefit patients.

Another point is that telehealth and technology have made care more personal, not less. I have five different cardiologists who treat me.

When I have questions about a medication or why I have been taken off of a medication, I would pick up the phone and call Frances.

She checks with the doctor and tells me they prescribed it because other medications have adverse reactions to my existing medications.

I also use MyHealtheVet to make appointments. It is very effective.

Telehealth is critically important to veterans' care. All veterans should have this opportunity.

Telehealth and the VA need to stay for the benefit of all vets. It would be a shame to lose these valuable assets.

Thank you for letting me share my story.