

Letters to the Editor

THE COST OF ELECTRONIC STETHOSCOPES

To the Editor:

I am working on a home care telemedicine project at the Dallas Veterans Affairs Medical Center, so I read with interest the article "Telemedicine" (*Hospital Physician* 1999;35[11]:26-34,36) by Perlin et al. The authors mention on page 31 that electronic stethoscopes are available for less than \$200. I would appreciate some information on electronic stethoscopes and any vendors of which the authors are aware because I have not found any vendors at this low cost.

David Hales, MD
Dallas, TX

In reply:

My co-authors and I thank Dr. Hales for his letter. Because the terms can be confusing, all interested readers should note that the article states "electronic stethoscope," not "digital stethoscope." Electronic stethoscopes, essentially Doppler instruments and analog amplified stethoscopes, begin at under \$200 to health care providers, though most list in the range of \$300 to \$400. Admittedly, purpose-built "digital stethoscopes" are more expensive. However, a major point of the article was that instruments with analog audio (eg,

electronic stethoscope) or video (eg, endoscopes, sonography instruments) output can be utilized. The analog signal will be digitized by the telemedicine equipment. Purpose-built digital instruments offer potentially less degradation of signal, but the specific purpose and program budget are essential considerations. Regardless of technology, analog or digital, the article emphasizes that quality assurance must occur in such a manner that the distant "tele-consultant" would arrive at the same clinical interpretation as if she or he were on site and providing the service in the traditional manner.

For general reference, some links for pricing electronic stethoscopes are listed in the **Sidebar**.

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WEB SITES PROVIDING RESOURCES FOR ELECTRONIC STETHOSCOPES

<http://www.steeles.com/elescope.html>
<http://www.allheart.com/allheart/2000.html>
<http://www.hearusa.com/stethoscopes.htm>
<http://www.stethoscopes.com/amplifiedscopes.htm>

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