

The first published Telenursing article was by Mary Quinn, RN in 1974. She described working in a Boston Hospital telemedicine Center and seeing patients remotely who were at Logan Airport.

What is Telehealth Nursing?

Any nurse who has spoken with a patient over the phone has practiced telehealth nursing; it is not a new role, although advances in technology allow nurses to see, monitor, and/or interact remotely with patients/patient devices. Telehealth nursing is defined as “the use of telehealth/telemedicine technology to deliver nursing care and conduct nursing practice.” Telenursing, telehealth nursing, nursing telepractice are interchangeable. Telehealth nursing is not a specialty area in nursing. Nurses in all settings who employ telecommunications and health technologies, such as, audio, video, or data integrated into their existing practice are providing telehealth nursing. Combined with a body of knowledge and competencies used to deliver nursing care over distance telehealth nurses are successfully caring for patients remotely.

Why Telehealth Nursing?

- Decrease hospital admissions & emergency department visits
- Manage chronic illness
- Impact nursing shortage by improving nurse utilization
- Reduce healthcare costs
- Provide access to care

Who are Telehealth Nurses?

In 2005, 719 telehealth nurses responded to an International Telenursing Survey.* The survey reported Registered Nurses & Advanced Practice Nurses, who were fulltime or part-time, work as telehealth nurses in the following regions:

- 49 of 50 states in the U.S. (Delaware not represented)
- 36 countries around the world [USA(68%); Canada (10%); Australia (5%); UK (4%); Norway (3.5%); New Zealand (1.1%); Sweden (1%); Iran (.6%); Finland (.6%); 3 countries with 3 telehealth nurses; 7 countries with 2 telehealth nurses; 17 countries with 1 telehealth nurse]

The exact number of global telenurses is unknown, however, ATA has over 500 telehealth nurse members. Other organizations that support telenurses are the *International Council of Nursing Telenursing Network*; *International Society for Telemedicine and eHealth Telenursing Working Group*, and *Canadian Telehealth Forum/COACH*.

*Grady, J.L, Schlachta-Fairchild, L., & Elfrink, V. (2005). Results of the 2004-2005 International Telenursing Survey. *Telemedicine and e-Health*, 11 (2), 197.

Where is Telehealth Nursing Practiced?

Telehealth nursing is practiced in the home, healthcare clinic, doctor’s office, prisons, hospitals, telehealth nursing call centers and mobile units. Telephone triage, remote monitoring and home care are the fastest growing applications. Home telehealth nurses use systems that allow monitoring of patient data and physiologic parameters, such as, blood pressure, heart sounds, blood glucose, oxygen levels, respiratory peak flow, and weight measurements via a phone or Internet connection. Through interactive video systems, patients contact on-call nurses and arrange a live video consultation to address problems; for example, how to change a dressing, give an insulin injection or to discuss increasing shortness of breath. Telehealth nursing is also used by call centers operated by managed care organizations, and staffed by RN case managers who conduct patient triage, education, counseling to regulate patient access/flow and decrease ER use. Telehealth nursing can also involve patient education, teleconsultations, conducting and communicating medical tests/results conducting physicals exams/assessment and collaboration with healthcare providers in implementing medical treatment protocols and providing follow-up care.

Telehealth Nursing practice areas include:

- TeleICU
- Telerriage
- Telertrauma
- Telerstroke
- Telerpediatrics
- Telermental Health
- Telercardiology
- Telerhomecare
- Telerrehabilitation
- Forensic Telenursing, etc.

When is Telehealth Nursing used?

Telehealth nursing is employed when there is a need to deliver nursing care remotely and improve efficiency and access to healthcare. A nurse can telepresent a patient to a remote physician, nurse practitioner, or physician assistant for assessment, evaluation and treatment for emergent and non emergent consultations, routine pre and post care as well as forensic abuse cases. Telehealth nurses deliver nursing care remotely, and are also creators, educators, designers, developers, implementers, and researchers of telehealth and ehealth services.

How does Telehealth Nursing work?

Telehealth nursing is a set of competencies for any nurse to utilize and are defined by the ICN. Certification is not required or recommended at this time. General information for implementing, planning or conducting any type of telehealth program can be found on the ATA website.

Licensure

Telehealth nursing may require an additional licensure to practice across state lines. In non-federal setting telehealth nurses must have a register nurse license that complies with both state and federal regulations. In the US, the nurse licensure compact (NLC) allows RN's to practice across compact members' state lines.

Competencies

Nurses must meet standards of care for safe, quality, and competent practice for telehealth nursing by practicing within the ANA scope and standards of nursing practice. Specific telehealth standards can be found with the American Academy of Ambulatory Care Nurses (AAACN) and American Nurses Association (ANA.) International telenursing competencies are available from the International Council of Nursing (ICN), which has rigorously reviewed and approved a 39 page competencies document. ICN competencies apply to nurses in the USA, Canada, and over 130 countries globally.

Legal

Patient confidentiality and HIPAA requirements apply to telehealth nursing. Privacy policies and informed patient consent remain the same for telehealth encounters as for in-person care.

Future

As the US healthcare environment continues to evolve due to changes in reimbursement, legal issues, and shrinking healthcare resources, the expanding role of telehealth nurses will continue to evolve. Leadership and collaboration among international nurses is needed to outline the uses of ehealth/telehealth technologies to provide nursing care in an interdisciplinary manner to patients, regardless of staffing, time, or geographic boundaries.

Complete References

For complete references go to the ATA website at americantelemed.org/telehealthnursing, scroll down to "Products and Resources."

More info - Web Links

- www.ncsbn.org/nlc.htm
- www.icn.ch/telenursing_network.htm
- www.isft.net/cms/index.php?telenursing

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