



## **The National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN®) Position Paper on Telehealth Nursing Practice**

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In the 1990s the increasing use of telecommunication technology to provide nursing services raised the question whether nursing services delivered through broadband and electronic channels constituted the practice of nursing. NCSBN recognizes nursing practice provided through broadband and electronic channels as the practice of nursing and thus asserts that the regulation of telehealth nursing is appropriately done by boards of nursing (BONs).

Telehealth nursing practice is defined as the practice of nursing delivered through various telecommunications technologies, including high speed Internet, wireless, satellite and televideo communications. The nurse engages in the practice of nursing by interacting with a client at a remote site to electronically receive the client's health status, initiate and transmit therapeutic interventions and regimens, and monitor and record the client's response and nursing care outcomes. The value of telehealth to the client is increased access to skilled, empathetic and effective nursing delivered through telecommunications technology.

Much of the debate 20 years ago focused on nursing by telephone. The nurse uses the televideo, email and other two-way telecommunication modalities to gather information from the client and to give appropriate advice based on a nursing diagnosis or medical protocol. Some providers pose that this is not nursing practice; however, all U.S. jurisdictions and many professional associations agree that if nursing services are delivered, nursing practice has occurred. How nursing services are delivered makes no difference. The challenge to regulation is to identify how nursing care can be safely and effectively delivered using telecommunications technology.

Telehealth is utilized by health care systems as a means for reducing health care costs by making it possible to spread the benefit of limited resources to a large population over a broad geographic region. Managed care organizations and demand-management companies are providing person-to-person contact via nurse telephone advice services. An issue for regulators is how does the caller know that the individual who receives the call is a nurse? Is the public expectation that identification by name and credential is required? If so, how is this verified?

Televideo and Internet support groups facilitated by nurses provide emotional and informational support to clients and families. To have an electronic presence to dispel isolation occurs through client-activated alert mechanisms and physical monitoring devices, such as remote telemetry. Does the client or public know the standards that nurses using this modality should be expected to meet and maintain? Does the public know how to report the failure of the nurse facilitator or nurse monitor to provide nursing practice with reasonable skill and safety?

The teaching-coaching embedded in skilled nursing care is perhaps the most readily recognized function which may be carried out using telecommunications. Because clients frequently check out their questions with the nurse before asking the physician, health care delivery systems have implemented "Ask a Nurse" televideo lines. Postdischarge telephone follow-up and Internet access to a nurse assists clients to "integrate" illness and recovery into their lifestyles. The regulatory community needs to address the patient's control or input regarding information and access, as well as the appropriateness of the type and level of information that is accessible.

Combining effective management of rapidly changing situations with the diagnostic and monitoring function is demonstrated by the well-established practice of televideo triage nursing and remote sensory collection devices. Televideo triage involves prioritizing a client's health problems according to their urgency, educating and advising clients, and making safe, effective and appropriate dispositions. Health care organizations use nurses for televideo triage to assess the patient's potential for wellness and response to various treatment strategies as a mechanism to reduce hospitalizations. This type of practice requires the use of electronic medical records.

The nurse's role in the implementation of medical regimens is also accomplished using telehealth. The electronic implementation of medical protocols or guidelines to achieve certain client health outcomes is an established delivery model. Nurses are expected to use professional judgment to carry them out by assessing what can be safely omitted from or added to medical orders, and by getting appropriate and timely responses from physicians in order to monitor and ensure the quality of health care practices. Interactive video technology using high speed infrastructure is used by nurses manipulating electronic sensors and interacting with a physician at a remote site to carry out such delegated medical functions as taking X-rays, suturing wounds and setting fractures. BONs and the medical practice must collaboratively identify the responsibility and accountability of practitioners in this interactive practice.

Another example of telehealth nursing practice is the use of interactive video devices via high speed Internet by home health care nurses to provide a means to detect any early warning signals for client complications. The nurse can use remote visual, auditory and tactile sensors, manipulated by the client or family members, to assess the client. Complications, such as breakdown and deterioration, can be anticipated or detected early, prior to confirming diagnostic signs. The data are transmitted electronically so the nurse can detect and document significant changes in a client's condition. Crisis televideo hotlines are used by nurses to identify and manage client crises until other assistance is available.

Often the client is located in one state and the nurse in another jurisdiction. What are the regulatory concerns for practice across state lines? Does the nurse need to be licensed in both states? The functional domains described thus far are examples of how nurses use telecommunications technology to deliver cognitive nursing care. Data are collected, interpreted and analyzed to develop a working diagnosis and plan. The plan is initiated by instructing the client how or where the treatment should occur.

The potential to administer and monitor therapeutic interventions and regimens is significant. Robotic range of motion may be implemented by continuous passive motion devices applied by the client or family member and remotely electronically controlled. Intravenous therapy may be similarly implemented. Through means of mobile broadband and cellular connectivity a client in a rural area is able to automatically transmit data from the client's insulin pump to a computer in a medical center. The data are compared with the client's blood sugar level, the pump's output is recalibrated and the new data are transmitted to the computer chip in the pump. This same technology is used to administer medications accurately and safely, and to monitor untoward effects, reactions, therapeutic responses, toxicity and incompatibilities.

These examples of telehealth nursing practice presented are not intended to be definitive of nursing practice, but rather are descriptive of how the practice of nursing may be carried out electronically using telecommunications technology. This list provides examples of telehealth nursing practice and is not intended to be exhaustive. Telecommunications is advancing at such a rapid rate that its application to health care delivery and nursing practice will continue to emerge and evolve.

Telecommunications and information technology have brought forward new situations and challenges to nursing regulators. The first step in resolving these regulatory concerns is to answer the question, "Does the provision of nursing services through electronic transmission constitute the practice of nursing?" Affirmatively, "Yes." The delivery of nursing services through the Internet or any other electronic channels constitutes the practice of nursing.

*Telehealth is the remote delivery of healthcare services and clinical information using telecommunications technology. This includes a wide array of clinical services using internet, wireless, satellite and telephone media.*

*-American Telemedicine Association, 2014*