

# TELEHEALTH NURSING

Telehealth nursing, or telenursing, is the use of audio and video technology and advanced digital and optical communications by specially trained nurses to deliver nursing care. This type of nursing care is usually in the form of care management for emergent or chronic conditions, coordination of care, and health maintenance services within the scope of nursing practice. The American Academy of Ambulatory Care Nursing wrote *Telehealth Nursing Scope and Standards of Practice* that delineates clinical, managerial and administrative approaches to the complex nursing roles required in Telehealth Nursing interventions.

Telenursing benefits both the patient and the nurse; the patient benefits from increased access to services, while the nurse benefits from a more flexible and less physically stressful work environment. It is predicted that telehealth nursing will become more widespread in the future.

## Background

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Telehealth nursing is a subfield of a medical practice area known as telehealth or telemedicine. This refers to any health care delivered through some form of communication other than personal contact. The field is as old as the telephone. Within a few years of the first telephone patent being issued in 1876, at least one medical journal, *The Lancet*, was advocating the use of the telephone for physician-patient consultations to eliminate the need for some in-person appointments. Since that time, physicians and nurses have frequently used the telephone to assess basic health issues, answer questions about medications and side effects, and reassure anxious patients. Twenty-four-hour access to nurse-staffed helplines have been a staple of health insurance benefits for many years.

What has brought the concept to the forefront is the increased availability and capability of new technology that can be used in the twenty-first century. Instead of merely listening to a parent describe his or her child's rash, for instance, a telehealth nurse, or telenurse, can use a video link to see the child. . This virtual link allows the nurse to use a wider range of education and experience to determine whether a situation is serious enough to require the in-person attention of a medical practitioner or whether another remedy can be recommended within practice guidelines.

Telenurses can use technology to have virtual consultations with patients who need assistance with health improvement programs such as smoking cessation or weight loss. The connection can help patients stay on track with their efforts, provide encouragement and support, and help the nurse identify any potential issues that are emerging. Prenatal patients and new mothers also benefit from these consultations.

Technology exists that allows a patient to connect in-home monitoring equipment, such as blood pressure devices, scales and blood glucose monitors, to a computer that can communicate with the nurse's computer. The nurse has direct access to

the readings and can determine whether a patient's condition is under control or is in need of adjustment or care. Telenurses can provide guidance and assurance to patients managing complex and chronic conditions, helping to improve their health outcomes, while also reducing the number of in-person office or hospital visits these patients need. Telenurses are valuable in helping senior patients with multiple health issues and patients with illnesses such as multiple sclerosis, hepatitis, AIDS, and other serious conditions to better manage their condition and coordinate their care.

Improved technology allows telehealth nurses to access far more patient records than any single nurse in a physician's office could. Records from several associated offices or from many offices within an insurance network can be accessed from a single call center. This allows the nurse to provide more personalized care, maintain better records of the care administered, and often, decrease duplication of care and medication interactions. The result is an improved patient experience that can often yield better outcomes. Fewer nurses are able to provide better care to more patients than would be possible if each office had to staff its own call center or if patients had to come in for in-person visits.

## Fast Fact

**Moving fast out of the gate is the relatively new specialty of Telehealth—which includes telenursing. The District of Columbia and 29 states mandate that health plans cover these services.**

Source: [waldenuniversity.com](http://waldenuniversity.com)

## Overview

Telehealth nursing is evolving from simply answering questions about medications or the possible causes of symptoms to being an integrated part of health care management for many patients. Nurses working in this capacity can develop ongoing connections with patients that allow them to develop a better perspective on how a patient's treatment is progressing, what problems the patient is experiencing with his or her treatment, and other information that can help the physician and the patient's entire health care team to provide better care. The technology-based consultations can provide more frequent interactions with patients who live in remote areas or who have barriers to coming to the physician's office, such as mobility or transportation issues.

Telenurses can serve as health coaches for people endeavoring to improve their health or for people recovering from life-altering medical situations, such as heart attacks or strokes. They often help to coordinate care for patients who see several physicians for multiple conditions, such as a patient with diabetes who needs to see a cardiologist for heart concerns, an ophthalmologist to monitor potential vision problems, and a podiatrist for proper foot care. Telenurses can serve as educators for people learning to cope with new illnesses or recovering from surgical procedures. In most cases, all

of these efforts can be done with fewer staff and at a lower cost than in-person care would require.

The practice of telehealth nursing provides some benefits for nurses, too. For many telehealth nurses, the job provides shorter, more regular work hours. Telenursing can allow for more focused specialization if the nurse so desires. It can allow the nurse to develop better relationships with patients in his or her caseload. Telenursing can also provide a way for nurses who have problems with the physical aspects of nursing such as long hours of standing and lifting patients, to continue practicing their profession.

While telenursing has many advantages, it also raises some concerns. Nurses sometimes worry that telenursing will eliminate jobs in the future. Others fear that the trend will lead to less personal health care, where in-person visits with nurses or physicians are the exception instead of the norm. Other concerns include the possibility of increased medical errors, the potential for medical problems to be missed by the lack of personal contact, and the greater possibility of electronic records theft and resulting medical fraud. It is also imperative that the telenurse practice within the scope of practice defined by state laws and the practice standards defined by the employer.

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