NANB

When can Telenursing Practice be Considered Appropriate?

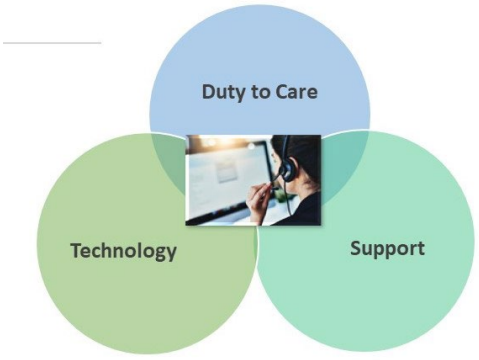
Telenursing practice requires the same professional, ethical, and legal responsibilities and accountabilities in the provision of safe, competent, and ethical care (ANA, 2019), as do all other types of nursing practice. While telenursing changes how nursing practice is conducted, it does not change the nature of nursing practice, or the nursing process that is foundational to the delivery of nursing care. Nurses[1] who engage in telenursing practice must comply with relevant legal[2] and regulatory requirements, as outlined in the *Standards of Practice*, the *Code of Ethics* , the *Guideline for Telenursing Practice*, as well as with employer policies (CASN, 2012).

Telenursing practice improves access to care, but it also carries barriers to accessing, collecting, and interpreting information because the client is in a different location (NANB, 2020). The remote location and the reliance on technology to relay accurate information may impact the nurse's ability to provide the required nursing care. Therefore, telenursing may not be appropriate in all situations.

Telenursing practice must be delivered in a manner that is in the best interest of the client (Field Law, 2019). Nurses need to reflect on their telenursing practice to ensure that they are not unknowingly causing risks for their clients. They must be aware of these risks[3] and recognize when telenursing does not or is no longer meeting the needs of the client and arrange for alternate means of delivering nursing care.

The framework in Figure 1 is intended to guide the reflection required to determine if telenursing practice is appropriate. The three elements to consider are: the duty to care, the technology being used, and the support available.

Figure 1: *Framework -Establishing the Appropriateness of Telenursing*



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[1] In this document, the term nurse includes graduate nurse, registered nurse, and nurse practitioner.
[2] For more information on legal considerations, please consult the CNPS webpage at: https://cnps.ca/article/twelve-things-to-consider-before-joining-a-virtual-care-practice/
[3] For more information on related risks, please consult the CNPS webpage at: https://cnps.ca/article/telepractice/

Duty to Care

In all nursing practice environments, the duty to care[4] is specific to the client, the provider, the type of practice, the location, and the availability of supports.

Nurses engaged in telenursing practice, establish a duty to care the moment they interact with the client through technology to provide care at a distance. Nurses are responsible and accountable for the care they provide.

Professional judgement and additional considerations (see Table 1) are required to determine if virtual care supports the delivery of evidence-informed and high-quality nursing care, that meets the needs and is in the best interest of the client.

***Table 1** - Reflecting on Duty to Care*

- *Have you met all registration requirements?*
- *Are you following the standards of practice?*
- *Can you ensure quality of nursing practice and client safety?*
- *Do you have the required technical and clinical competencies for telenursing practice?*
- *Can you apply the nursing process through this platform?*
- *Are you obtaining informed consent?*
- *Is the client able to participate in this virtual application of care?*
- *Is the nursing process and your rationale for decision-making captured in your documentation?*
- *Can you arrange for continuity of care (availability of imaging, laboratory, and pharmaceutical services, acceptance of virtual prescriptions/orders, and health care instructions)?*

This list of questions is not exhaustive and is meant to assist in the reflexion that should occur to determine the appropriateness of telenursing practice.

Technology

The form of technology used for telenursing practice must correspond to the level of care required and meet client's needs. Furthermore, reliable, and valid data transmission is essential to keeping clients safe., Hughes (as cited in Schlachta-Fairchild et al., 2008).

Therefore, it is important to reflect on what is appropriate technology for telenursing practice. (see Table 2). Measures must be in place to reduce the risk for breaches of privacy and confidentiality (e.g., cybersecurity), and to maintain the ethical and

***Table 2** - Reflecting on Technology*

- *Does the technology allow to meet the client' needs?*
- *Is the connection / data transmission reliable?*
- *Do you have a dedicated computer or phone line?*
- *Do you have measures in place to reduce the risk for breaches of privacy and confidentiality (e.g., cybersecurity, encryption of data)?*
- *Is the technology accessible and easy to use for the clients?*

This list of questions is not exhaustive and is meant to assist in the reflexion that should occur to determine the appropriateness of telenursing practice.

[4] Nurses have a professional duty and a legal obligation to provide persons receiving care with safe, competent, compassionate, and ethical care. For additional information on duty to care, please refer to the *Practice Guideline: Duty to Provide Care (NANB, 2020)*.

legal requirements for confidentiality of electronic information. If the technology is not appropriate, then a process must be in place to address this limitation or revert to another method of providing care, including transfer of care.

Support

Supports must be in place in all employment settings, including working from home, to ensure safe and appropriate provision of telenursing care.

Policies clearly articulating the form(s) of telenursing care that can be provided (e.g., telephone consultation, videoconferencing, tele robotics) and how telenursing care should be conducted, allows providers and clients to connect in a safe way, while ensuring nursing practice expectations are being met.

The nurse must consider the type of support that is required and available, to provide optimal telenursing care (see Table 3) and adhere to relevant legislation[5] and policies.

***Table 3** - Reflecting on Support*

- *Are policies and processes in place to guide your telenursing practice? re: client identification/ verification of location, informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, protection of personal health information, management of downtimes / failure of technology, and documentation.*
- *Does your workspace allow you to maintaining client privacy and confidentiality?*
- *Who is the custodian of the client record?*
- *Is collaboration/consultation with other health care providers possible?*
- *Do you have access to decision-making tools to support the delivery of telenursing care consistently and according to best practices?*

This list of questions is not exhaustive and is meant to assist in the reflexion that should occur to determine the appropriateness of telenursing practice.

If policies are not in place, then the nurse must advocate and support their development. It is also important to ensure policies are revised when there is need to adapt the delivery of telenursing care to continue to meet client needs.

Telenursing is rapidly expanding and being used more commonly. Nurses should always be reflecting on their practice, and advocating to ensure safe, competent, and ethical care and quality practice environments. Telenursing care carries risks and requires additional considerations to ensure it is appropriate. Telenursing should only be provided once you have reflected and can ensure that this mean of providing care allows you to meet your duty to care appropriately, with the appropriate technology and the appropriate support.

For guidance on the practice of telenursing, please refer to the Telenursing Toolkit in the Documents and Resources section of the NANB website. Questions regarding responsibilities and accountabilities of telenursing practice, can be directed to a Nurse Consultant at 1-800-442-4417/506-458-8731 or by email at practiceconsultation@nanb.nb.ca.

[5] For more information on: custodian of health records and related provincial / territorial laws, please refer to CNPS: https://cnps.ca/article/are-you-a-custodian-or-trustee-of-health-records/ ; or on the Personal Health Information Privacy and Access Act, please refer to: http://laws.gnb.ca/en/ShowTdm/cs/P-7.05/

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