

Telehealth, Telemedicine and Telenursing

Molli Courtney

Leach College of Nursing, University of St. Francis

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Samantha Whiteaker

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Abstract

Telehealth and telemedicine are ways to provide virtual healthcare to patients at a distant or hard to reach areas through the use of various technological devices. In current times, these methods have become more prominent due to the need of proper social distancing. This paper seeks to examine the impact of telehealth during the pandemic and throughout the past years. Also, how patients, as well as clinicians, have benefited from the use of such technologies throughout these past years, especially during the global pandemic.

Telehealth, Telemedicine, and Telenursing

Ever since the beginning of the Covid SARS 2 pandemic in 2019, telehealth and virtual medicine has become more prominent in the healthcare field. In response to the increasing rate of infections, many physicians found it safer to communicate and treat their non-critical patients through the use of technology and virtual medicine. Today, this practice has expanded to allow for minor illness visits and medical advice through communication with a healthcare professional. In past years, telehealth began to be used by more physicians, however it was more prominent in the healthcare setting to determine the level of care a patient might need. Another way that telehealth was being used previously is through the poison control center where anyone in healthcare or the general public could call to speak to a pharmacist that could advise on the correct treatment protocol for any particular poisoning.

Telehealth and telemedicine are terms that are commonly intertwined and used to describe the same thing. They can simply be defined as the use of technology and telecommunication to provide care to a patient when the patient and physician or nurse are not in the same place at the same time (Berman et al., 2016). Telenursing is similar and can be defined as the use of telecommunications and information technology to provide the practice of nursing at a distance (Berman et al., 2016).

Even though very similar, there are differences that can be noted when looking closer at each of these specifically. Telehealth refers to a much larger scope of remote healthcare services than telemedicine does (National Coordinator for Health Information Technology, 2019). Whereas telemedicine refers specifically only to remote clinical services. With telehealth, it can also refer to remote non-clinical services, such as provider training, administrative meetings, and continuing education for medical professionals in addition to clinical services that would be

commonly provided in telemedicine (National Coordinator for Health Information Technology, 2019). Telenursing is directly correlated to telehealth and telemedicine, with a distinction in who is providing the care. With telenursing, the same services can be provided to the patient, such as monitoring, patient directed care, diagnosing for nurse practitioners (NP) and even therapy, however it is the nurse who is providing the care instead of the medical doctor (MD) (Berman et al., 2016).

With telehealth, the patient can meet with the doctor virtually to discuss different treatment or diagnostic options, such as possible X-rays, results of lab tests, therapy and counseling, recurring conditions like migraines or urinary tract infections, skin conditions, prescription management, urgent care issues such as coughs and minor illnesses, and lastly post-surgical follow-up (Health Resources & Services Administration, 2021). Allowing patients to reach their physicians from the comfort of their home also increases the probability of the patient being compliant with the healthcare regime when they don't have to leave for several different appointments (Health Resources & Services Administration, 2021). This is especially true when looking at patients that have to provide their own care to children or other family members, they may not have the ability to leave their home for even short periods of time to attend to doctor appointments for themselves. Having the option to meet virtually means they don't need to find someone to continue the care for either children, elderly, or other family members (Health Resources & Services Administration, 2021).

Since the onslaught of COVID-19, telehealth, telemedicine and telenursing have become much more prominent. In many cases this is as a result of trying to continue to monitor the patient's condition while also being able to prevent placing the patient at risk of contracting the virus. Also, it has shown to help reduce the amount of hospital and urgent care visits as patients

can see a provider to address their issues in a short amount of time in the comfort of their own home (Advent Health, 2017). Personally, I have found that telehealth options have made healthcare much more accessible to most patients and has decreased the number of inpatient admissions into the hospital.

With the influx of a great number of new medical staff members into various medical settings, telehealth can be used to help educate these staff members in different protocols, methods of treatment, among other on the job training requirements. With most training that used to be done face-to-face through lectures and power point presentations, these can just as easily be done through video recordings and interactive modules to teach the same materials. In many different healthcare educational programs, these options are being utilized now in response to the pandemic, with students learning virtually at a distance to help prevent the spread of the virus. The same concepts can be used in different health care organizations to reduce the amount of mass gatherings required for staff education.

When the pandemic shut down the majority of the United States of America (USA), obtaining healthcare for myself or my children was at first very difficult. Shortly after April 2020 however, virtual meetings with physicians for urgent care as well as follow-up visits with primary care physicians became readily available. Therefore, when minor illnesses happened at my house with any one of my children, I could easily reach a medical professional to have their opinion of what form of treatment, if any, they suggested. With my experiences, I believe that telehealth has increased the availability of healthcare to many patients in many different settings. The cost of most of these telehealth visits are also much more cost effective than actually visiting the primary care provider for a general visit. Thus, I feel like actually allowing this option to all

patients, if acceptable for the medical need, would greatly increase the patient's compliance with their medical regime.

Although there are still patients that prefer to see their physicians in person, many have become more comfortable with the concepts of telehealth, telemedicine and telenursing. From my own experiences, telenursing has helped to ensure that myself, or my children, are given adequate information on the necessity to seek immediate medical assistance. When the pandemic first closed all businesses, including most healthcare offices, telehealth became my go-to method to speak to a physician about a minor illness or injury my children sustained. As technology advances, I believe that the abilities of telehealth, telemedicine and telenursing will also advance, allowing for a greater expanse of care to be provided to patients in need.

References

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