

Practice Directive:

Virtual Care

Prince Edward Island College of Nursing
and Midwifery

March 15, 2024

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This practice directive is intended for all designation of nurses (NP, RN, RPN, and LPN) regulated by PEICNM.

Virtual care is the delivery of health services remotely using digital technologies, such as video conferencing, secure messaging, and mobile apps, to connect patients and providers for assessment, diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up without requiring in-person visits. Other terms for virtual care may be telenursing, telepractice, or telehealth. The number of nurses in Canada working in virtual care is increasing. The introduction of technology into nursing practice has provided many advances in information sharing and new devices that have improved the quality of care delivery.

As self-regulating professionals, nurses are regulated under the Regulated Health Professions Act (RHPA) and the corresponding regulations, which outline the accountabilities and responsibilities of nurses. This includes a legal responsibility to practice within their scope of practice, scope of employment, and individual level of competence. All nurses must know what they are authorized and competent to perform, including any limitations in knowledge, judgement, and skill.

Synchronous telehealth is a live, face-to-face interaction between client and the nurse. This requires audio and video devices for both the client and nurse to provide a traditional real time, bi-directional interaction between the client and nurse (Fathi, Modin & Scott, 2017). Examples of synchronous telehealth is mobile health/live video (eg: Maple, Felix) or telerounding. The nurse is accountable to be knowledgeable about the technological device and applications utilized and to ensure that they are in accordance with their employer's privacy and safety standards. The nurse is responsible to obtain consent prior to the use of videoconferencing as a means of communication. Technical difficulties such as poor resolution or disrupted reception may arise, which can result in the disruption of care.

Asynchronous telehealth is real time communication but not face to face. For example, emails, internet, and text messaging or 'store and forward'. Store and forward refers to the collection of clinical information using a computer or phone and sending the information electronically to another care provider for consultation or evaluation. Clinical information may include demographic data, medical history, laboratory reports, images, and videos.

The nurse is responsible to ensure that the modality utilized in practice is acceptable according to the employer's policy and appropriate for clients' needs. The nurse must be knowledgeable and aware of employer policies when delivering care through any of these methods.

Providing Telehealth to a resident of Prince Edward Island

To provide telehealth services to a resident of Prince Edward Island, the nurse **must be registered with PEICNM**. In the Regulated Health Professions Act (2013), subsection 2(3), it is stated that "no person shall practice the regulated health profession except as a member of the college for the regulated health profession".

When registered with PEICNM, the nurse must adhere to all statutes and regulations, practice standards, codes of ethics/code of ethical conduct, and bylaws that govern nursing practice in PEI. If a nurse is registered in multiple jurisdictions, they are responsible to adhere to the requirements in each of those jurisdictions for the practice in the jurisdiction. For example, anyone registered in PEI must complete jurisprudence and the continuing competence program in PEI.

Providing telehealth services to a resident of another province or territory

Each province and territory in Canada are governed by their own legislation. The nurse must contact the regulatory body of the province or territory where they wish to provide telehealth services before providing such services to residents.

Roles and responsibilities

The nurse is accountable to practice within their scope of practice, scope of employment, and individual level of competence and must have a plan for the event of a technological failure.

All nurses must maintain responsibility and accountability by providing competent, safe and ethical nursing practice as outlined by the Standards of Nursing Practice. Some considerations include:

- The nurse must ensure that the quality and safety of the service provided is not compromised due to the use of virtual care.
- Ensure the method in which the service is provided will meet the client's needs.
- The nurse must recognize that they may not have all of the client's information due to their inability to do a "hands on" assessment. Some clients may also be unwilling to disclose sensitive information through virtual care. The nurse must gather as much information as possible related to the client concern. If they feel information is missing, the nurse may consider referring the client on for a different method of care (face-to-face).
- If clients' needs can no longer be met through virtual care, the nurse must follow the employer's guidelines for transferring care to ensure continuity in care.

When determining if virtual care is appropriate for the client, the nurse will consider:

- Purpose of the visit
- Client's access care
- Access to the client health record
- The client's access to the required technology (devices, platforms, internet bandwidth) and private space
- The skills required for the client to access care
- Any special considerations needed for language, vision, hearing, or dexterity

(NANB, 2024)

It is the nurse's responsibility to explain the technology that will be used, why it will be used, and who will have access to the information collected. When delivering care via technological means, the nurse is accountable under Prince Edward Island's Health Information Act and is required to be knowledgeable about employer policies.

All nurses are accountable to obtain and document consent, maintain privacy, confidentiality and safeguard clients' personal and health information when providing care via technology. The nurse must ensure that the technology and setting for the interaction does not breach confidentiality.

- Informed consent must be obtained prior to providing care. This includes informing the client of the nurse's name and designation, the purpose of the interaction, whether the interaction is being recorded to share with other care providers, and who the other care providers may be.
- The nurse must educate and inform the client that because the client is not within the controlled environment of the health care facility, confidentiality may be compromised. The nurse should encourage the client to be an active participant in maintaining confidentiality by taking care to choose a secure, private environment.
- It is the responsibility of the nurse to verify their client's identity.
- The nurse must ensure the client is aware of the limitations of the technology used, treatment options available, and risks and benefits involved.
- When delivering care via technology, confidentiality breaches can be reduced by ensuring that the information, software and data transmission are encrypted.
- The nurse must be aware that there are various forms of consent. Examples include verbal consent, and written consent that may be faxed or scanned and emailed. The nurse must follow employer policies regarding types of consent required.
- The nurse must be conscious of how personal health information is collected, used, modified, disclosed, retained, destroyed, or disposed.

The nurse should avoid using their personal devices when possible. If they must use their own device, the nurse must ensure that safeguards are in place to prevent a potential privacy breach. They must also be knowledgeable and aware of employer policy surrounding the use of personal mobile devices. Necessary safeguards are the use of personal identifiers, strong passwords, and encryption. Public Wi-Fi or unsecured cellular networks should also be avoided when sending and receiving information. Generally, access to smartphones and tablets require a password, biometric lock, or two-factor authentication. This makes access to data on these devices more difficult to obtain; however, the nurse still needs to be alert of other risks including cyberattacks, especially when data is stored on cloud-based storage systems (Canada Nurses Protective Society, 2023).

Therapeutic Nurse Client Relationship

Developing and maintaining a therapeutic nurse-client relationship via technology is different from a face-to-face interaction, and effective communication is key. The nurse must ensure that the client understands what is being said to them. Depending on the type of technology being used, non-verbal cues may be lost. Communication strategies such as asking the client to repeat back instructions may help to ensure understanding. Just as in face-to-face interactions, the nurse is accountable for gathering all relevant health information. Please see PEICNM's practice directive "Therapeutic Nurse Client Relationship" for more detail.

Documentation

Documentation of virtual care is necessary for the provision and continuity of care. It is a vital component of safe, ethical, and effective nursing practice, regardless of the context of practice or whether the technology for documentation is paper based or electronic. Technology can be used to collect and provide health information to patients and health care professionals. When providing and documenting care the nurse must remember the following:

- Prior to providing virtual care, the nurse must obtain and document consent.
- All information gathered and actions performed are to be documented in accordance with employer' policies.
- The nurse who provides care via technology, must document interactions with the client according to the PEICNM Practice Directive: Documentation Standards.
- Documentation may be in paper or electronic format and should be stored according to the relevant legislation and employer' policies.
- When the nurse does not have access to the client's health record, another method of collecting and recording the information must be utilized such as a telephone log.
- When a virtual method is used to consult another health care provider concerning a client's care, a consistent method for collecting and recording the information must be used.

The nurse's documentation of the virtual care delivered must include: the date and time of the interaction; name or initials of client when applicable; reason for the interaction; advice/care provided; any follow-up required; and the documenting nurse signature and designation. Nurses must document assessments, nursing activities, and client outcomes in an accurate, timely and thorough manner.

For more information on documentation please refer to PEICNM's Documentation Practice Directive.

Recommendations for Employers

As telenursing can be a higher-risk practice, the following considerations should be made when creating policies:

- Process to determine if telenursing will meet the client's needs
- Choice of technology and platforms
- Process to follow if client needs to be assessed in person
- Procedure to follow if telenursing technology is not working or unavailable
- Informed consent
- Privacy and confidentiality
- Documentation
- Security and ownership of client records
- Appropriate video/telephone behaviours
- Liability protection
- Process for ordering pharmacological, non-pharmacological and diagnostic tests
- Sending and receiving consultations and referrals

(Nova Scotia College of Nursing, 2023)

References

Canadian Nurses Protective Society. (2023). *Infolaw: Mobile devices in the workplace*. Accessed on March 4, 2024 from <https://cnps.ca/article/mobile-devices-in-the-workplace/>

Fathi, J.T., Modin, H.E., Scott, J.D., (2017). "Nurses Advancing Telehealth Services in the Era of Healthcare Reform" OJIN: The Online Journal of Issues in Nursing Vol. 22, No. 2, Manuscript 2. doi:10.3912/OJIN.Vol22No02Man02

Nova Scotia College of Nurses. 2023. *Practice guidelines for nurses: Telenursing*. Accessed on March 4, 2024 from <https://www.nscn.ca/professional-practice/practice-support/practice-support-tools/telenursing/telenursing>