Navigating telehealth in rehabilitation: One nurse’s orientation odyssey

Colleen A. Berding BSN RN-BC CRRN MSCN
University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus, College of Nursing, Aurora, CO

Abstract

- This poster describes the orientation process of a spinal cord injury/dysfunction (SCI/D) rehabilitation nurse into the world of telehealth for this patient group in a Midwestern rehabilitation hospital.

Introduction

- Telehealth is a new and growing specialty not often addressed in baccalaureate nursing programs (Gallagher-Lepak, S. et al., 2009). Specialty nurses, particularly rehabilitation nurses, possess a number of skills that can make a difference in how they can successfully orient to a new genre of nursing, such as telehealth nursing for specific populations, such as SCI/D patients.

Project

- Where does one find a telehealth nurse? Generally, a SCI telehealth nurse coordinator meets the criteria of an experienced nurse (3 or more years) in SCI nursing, with additional related certification and case management experience desired.
- How is a telehealth nurse trained? As stated in the ANA Nursing Informatics Scope and Standards of Practice (2008), the telehealth nurse fulfills a support role, in a clinical practice “with technical aspects required to deliver care.” (ANA, p. 30)
- This poster will describe the means by which technical training is provided, based on the informatics competencies and functional areas defined in this Scope and Standards, as well as examples of how these standards are met.

Standard 1: Assessment

- "The informatics nurse collects comprehensive data, information and knowledge pertinent to the situation.”
- General information relating to telehealth training was available at onset from national telehealth training resources for clinical video and home telehealth. The SCI/D nurse was responsible for gathering information related to program development, deployment and adhering to suggested guidelines for training completion and review in the local hospital.

Standard 2: Problem and issues identification

- "The informatics nurse analyzes the assessment data to determine the problems or issues.”
- Program development and delayed use of training were issues. Problems with program development assessed included determining which programs to implement and their sequence, needs assessments, clinic flows, and cost-benefit analyses for each specialty program.
- Delayed training use was an issue deploying home telehealth, as this modality requires additional training for compliance purposes. Technology deployed to patient homes was delayed.

Standard 3: Outcomes identification

- "The informatics nurse identifies expected outcomes for a plan individualized to the situation.”
- Training outcomes were determined by national telehealth groups affiliated with the rehabilitation hospital.
- Telehealth program development within the rehab hospital was tailored by the department in collaboration with the hospital’s telehealth council.

Standard 4: Planning

- "The informatics nurse develops a plan that prescribes strategies, alternatives, and recommendations to attain expected outcomes.”
- Training plans were completed based on program guidelines.
- Program plans were developed in conjunction with the local interdisciplinary telehealth council and related local groups (information technology, clinical programming, and health information management). Each specialty service telehealth program had a Telehealth Service Agreement with the SCI/D rehabilitation unit defining the scope of services, responsibilities for each party participating and a communication plan.

Standard 5: Implementation

- "The informatics nurse implements the identified plan.”
- Coordination of care: The telehealth nurse coordinates clinic flow for patients and providers with relevant in-patient staff and service line personnel.
- Health teaching and health promotion and education: The informatics nurse employs strategies to promote health teaching, health promotion, and education for informatics solutions.
- Each patient participating in SCI/D rehabilitation telehealth encounters was educated in advance and verbal consent obtained prior to participation. Patients were also offered an orientation to the equipment used in advance to alleviate any anxiety regarding this care medium.
- Consultation: The informatics nurse provides consultation to influence the identified plan, enhance the abilities of others, and effect change.
- The telehealth nurse coordinated care and process with primary patient providers as well as specialists, to enhance implementation of the SCI/D rehabilitation care plan.

Standard 6: Evaluation

- "The informatics nurse evaluates progress towards attainment of outcomes.”
- Training plans were reviewed on a quarterly basis.
- Unique patient encounters were analyzed relative to facility goals.
- Cost-benefit analysis scheduled on established program in six and 12 months.

Conclusion

- The standards used determine technical competencies to be measured, however, creativity is the cornerstone to success when implementing and managing telehealth nurse orientation programs. Previous encounters with patients on the inpatient unit was essential in establishing credibility and patient buy-in for these initiatives. Resilience and repetition in simulated environments, and cohort support (within a telehealth nurse group) was also helpful.
- Telehealth nursing functions will continue to change as technology and programs in healthcare institutions evolve.

References

ANA Nursing Informatics Scope and Standards of Practice (2008), American Nurses Association, Silver Spring, MD.
Gallagher-Lepak, S., Scheibel, P. & Gibson, C. (June, 2009), Integrating Telehealth in Nursing Curricula: Can You Hear Me Now? Online Journal of Nursing Informatics (OJNI), 13, (2.)