Telenursing

Introduction

For many years, nurses have been identified with their role of provision of medical care to ill patients in hospitals, clinics, special care facilities or individual homes. With the adoption of technology in many professions, however, nursing has not been left out. Laura defines telenursing as a process through which professional nurses use telecommunication devices to provide care to patients, track their progress after being discharged and provide advice to them (Laura, 2008). Telenursing has not recently come up in the twenty-first century. It has been in existence since the 1970s. The proponents of telecommunication in nursing argue that it saves on costs, enables nurses to reach wide remote geographical areas where hospitals are scarce and provides chronically ill patients with an opportunity for a quick response (Skiba, 1998). The rampant question from opponents, however, is whether the practice is effective, and if it is, to what extent it gets. Many people have questions about telenursing that professionals who are well acquainted with it should find easy to answer. Whenever this practice comes into light, questions such as how, where, why and in what circumstances it should be adopted always arise. Another common issue with patients or their relatives relates to how confidential the patient's information is treated and the binding rules that prohibit a nurse from disclosing a patient's information (American Telemedicine Association, 2011).

The American Telemedicine Association (2011) tries to provide a solution to these constant worries. It states that telenursing is practiced at homes, healthcare clinics, doctor's office, prisons, hospitals, telenursing health centers and mobile units. The American Telemedicine Association allows only licensed nurses who have satisfied all legal requirements of a nurse in any country and in accordance with the international standards to use telenursing in the monitoring of patients. The practice includes client confidentiality policies. Telenursing is

acceptable in both rural and urban situations, but it is mostly needed in rural areas when there is a need but less access to medical healthcare facilities. This paper espouses further the queries by interacting with the various tenets of the nursing profession and technology-based platforms through a discussion of its advantages and the disadvantages. After an analysis of the topic, the paper provides recommendations on whether a traditional nurse should venture into the field of telenursing.

Advantages of Telenursing

Easy Management of Chronic Illnesses

One of the greatest advantages of telenursing is the convenience it offers to patients with chronic illnesses. This is facilitated through tracking of the patients, assisting them in managing their symptoms and in the provision of a platform for the coordination of their care. The process is to co-ordinate the provision of a large network of health professionals, not only from the nursing field (Laura, 2008). Dr .Wakefield of the Truman memorial veteran hospital located in Columbia further states that, when a telenurse is considering which kind of technology they should use on a patient, the patients' needs must be taken into consideration. He concludes that face to face contact is only suitable to patients with psychiatric problems but not severe with regard to chronicle diseases.

From this, he implies that technology in nursing care is suitable in managing the latter cases (Wakefield 2008). Some of the chronic diseases that can be managed effectively using telenursing include heart failure, diabetes, emphysema and chronic wounds. The process is conducted through the use of both audio and video devices which are interactive in nature. A nurse can see a patient and vice versa, and provide a platform where communication flows both ways. Wakefield further explains that when patients with heart failure are treated and discharged, they are given heavy dosages which create confusion to them. He views this as a manageable

situation since a home monitoring system can be used by the care-giving nurse in giving guidance for the patient's service.

Telenursing Curbs the Shortage of Nurses by Putting to Use Those Available

Many patients die because of the shortage of medical facilities and nurses throughout the world, more so in developing countries. Through telenursing, these cases can be reduced as doctors and nurses would be able to provide prescriptions over telephones and video devices after assessing the symptoms of the patient through the same mode. These nurses and doctors also form a large network in which they are capable of administering to multiple patients at the same time and twenty-four hours a day. Telenursing will thus create confidence in the health status of patients as they do not need to worry about shortage of health facilities or health personnel. Telenursing may be particularly important in cases of emergency.

Reduction of Health Care Costs

Telenursing has been proven to cut costs of medical care. These results are inclined towards the reduction of travel when moving patients to hospitals and the amounts payable to doctors and nurses during physical examination and treatment. It reduces the period which patients are supposed to spend in hospitals by allowing comfortable homecare services. In Iceland, for example, telephone based intervention systems were introduced to help nursing mothers provide care for their infants and thus reduce fatigue and stress. The program also allowed women with pregnancy induced hypertension to remain safe at home without being bedridden (David, 2008).

Provision of Access to Medical Healthcare

Telecommunication in nursing has achieved the ability to utilize limited nursing resources to benefit certain geographical areas. From the study undertaken by the University of

Saskatchewan, it is evident that it is difficult for patients suffering from cardiac arrests and living in remote areas to participate in successful Cardiac Risk reduction. Through the use of monitoring equipment and consultations via telephones, however, clients living in remote areas can successfully receive cardiovascular risk reduction treatment. The telehealth method of Cardiovascular Risk Reduction was ruled more favorably than the traditional nursing methods at the end of this study. The modern improvements in technology have thus been proved sufficient in healthcare management (David, 2008).

Hospital Visits Reduction for Patients

In most instances, when a patient has been discharged, there are follow-ups that are recommended by the hospital. Telenursing reduces them in that when a patient is discharged, follow-ups can be done via a home care service. Constant visits to hospitals are on many occasions very costly besides the cost of medication.

Enhances Patients Voice in Decision Making

Through video devices used during telenursing, an interactive forum is created where a patient is able to communicate with the nurses and be part of the decisions made. Any physical symptoms can be checked through video interviews. Patients get enough time to interact with their doctors and seek solutions to their problems.

Disadvantages of Telenursing

May Fall Prey to Inexperienced Nurses Thus Get Wrong Advice

Telenursing is a field which should be specifically a domain of the most experienced nurses. Unlike in past years where the modes of communication were slow thus gave room for

research of the symptoms of a patient, today, the modes of communication are instantaneous, and therefore, when patients call, they demand an immediate response. This may make an inexperienced nurse to deliver an impulse medical decision that may affect the patient negatively.

Erosion of Ethical Standards Such As Privacy and Confidentiality

Privacy is among the greatest concerns raised in the adoption of technology based operations. Patients and their relatives worry that nurses may disclose information concerning the illness or status of the patient to third parties, which may affect the patient in several negative ways. Disclosure of certain medical records may affect a patient's reputation or cost them their means of livelihood. Telecommunication platforms that use the World Wide Web often fall prey to hacking, and as such, clients' information may be affected.

Understanding the Telehealth Application Software's May Be Difficult for Patients

The telehealth systems are sometimes very difficult for patients to understand since they comprise a vast number of applications that patients may not be well versed with. These applications include drafting emails, skills in video conferencing, and competency in database management systems. Without clear proper knowledge of telecommunication operations, patients may still require to make physical visits to their health providers as opposed to using telenursing facilities (Mcgonigle & Mastrian, 2009).

System Errors

Technology has made life easier in the nursing sector, but it has also fallen prey to system errors. Technology is vulnerable to certain factors such as the availability of electricity. The machines used through telenursing can only operate with the availability of electric power. Patients living in areas where the power supply fluctuates may not be in a position to benefit

from these services. The application software also relies on the World Wide Web for functioning. Whenever there is low-internet service, nurses cannot access their patients, and this may happen during a critical moment for the patient. The Application systems used for telenursing are not much different from those used in other machines. They are often prone to viruses, thus may not be reliable at all times. Viruses distort the normal functioning of applications, thus may cause a risk to the patient's health in this case (Mcgonigle & Mastrian, 2009).

Costs Incurred in Telenursing

The Telenursing application software's run over the Internet, thus they require installation and monitoring. The installation and running processes are not free; therefore, patients must cater for these costs. Since these machines require the employment of technical skills, patients must hire experts to make proper installations prior to their access. The cost of these machines and software's at most times cannot be afforded by poor people who form the majority of the patients in the remote areas.

Limited Face To Face Contact

In medicine, face to face contact between the patient and the doctor gives the doctor ample time to examine the patient and create a bound, which allows them to make observations relating to any changes in the patient's condition. Doctors and nurses are able to conduct activities such as taking body temperature, blood pressure and the pulse, without having to give directions as is in Telenursing (Wakefield, Bylund, Holman & Ray, 2008). The patient feels more confident dealing with the doctor face to face unlike when they are on the phone. Patients are more likely to feel that their information is safe with the doctor when communicating with them face to face. This mostly arises in situations where people have already created a strong culture that treatment is only valid if administered face to face.

The doctor or Nurse is Unable to Visualize the Patient

There are some telenursing platforms in which the doctor relies on only a telephone as a mode of communication. This platform does not provide the doctor with an opportunity to visualize the patient and examine them accordingly. The doctor may make a decision which may end up having adverse effects to the patient. Visualization also enables the patient to create confidence by identifying the nurse who will be handling their ailments. Otherwise, it is likely that someone else may impersonate the doctor and offer poor quality services which will in the long run have a negative impact on the patient (Cardiol, 2008).

Conclusion

Just like the actual day to day practice of medicine and nursing in hospitals and clinics, telenursing provides the same service, the main difference being that it is done over telecommunication devices. In as much as it may have a few challenges, on the wider scale, telenursing has assisted a lot especially in remote areas and more so in places where there is acute shortage of nurses. It saves on costs and reduces the travelling expenses that patients have to incur while going to consult a doctor and maintaining follow up visits.

Recommendations

From the above discourse and in relation to Manuel's case, Manuel, being a professional surgeon who has been in practice, should feel confident enough to take up the job so long as he is licensed. He should, however, keep in mind that all the other policies with regard to ethical standards of a medical practitioner should be observed accordingly. Manuel is required to sign up all the legal policies regarding telehealth service provision. He will also be required to maintain client confidentiality with regard the patients. All information regarding the patient must be kept secret, and at no time should it be disclosed to unauthorized persons. He must ensure that the system in use is safe and closely monitored to eliminate any cases of hacking or

system failure. Manuel should ensure that he is well versed with the various application software used in telenursing as he will be required to interact with them on a daily basis. He must acquaint himself with a wide range of emailing services, videoconferencing, telephone calls and the World Wide Web.

Manuel must learn how to act on emergency cases since telenursing necessitates that patients make contact when they are in urgent need of help. Most of the patients who use telenursing request urgent solutions to their problems. Where, however, Manuel is not sure, he should be honest to the client and refer them to a later time after doing a thorough research.

Manuel should not totally abandon the hospital because in the event of failure of the machines, he should always refer the patients to the hospital. This means that before he resorts to use such mechanism, the patient should have a chance of seeing the doctor physically. Manuel should further consider that not all diseases can be handled over the telecommunication systems and should, therefore, keep note of the same. Such diseases include mostly those that are psychiatric in nature. Lastly, before Manuel makes his final decision on whether he should move, he should consider the pay and job satisfaction so that he does not end up regretting it later.