

Position Statement

SUMMARY

Telehealth has been defined as “the use of electronic information and telecommunications technologies to support long-distance clinical health care, patient and professional health-related education, public health and health administration” (United States Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS], n.d.). Telehealth enables collaboration of healthcare professionals to provide healthcare services across a variety of settings. The registered professional school nurse (hereinafter referred to as a school nurse) uses clinical knowledge and judgment to provide health care to students and staff, perform health screenings and coordinate referrals to the medical home or private healthcare provider (Wolfe, 2013). The school nurse serves in a pivotal role to provide expertise and oversight for the provision of school health services, promotion of health education, and connection between the academic setting and healthcare settings. Therefore, the school nurse is a critical link to the successful implementation and use of telehealth technology.

It is the position of the National Association of School Nurses (NASN) that telehealth technology may be used to augment school health services but not replace in-person health care provided by the school nurse.

HISTORY

The world has become increasingly reliant on a variety of technologies to manage information needs. Technology is “revolutionizing the way that health care is delivered with a steady infusion of new solutions to clinical environments” (Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society [HIMSS], 2011 p. 3). “Nurses have already taken a leadership role in embracing technology as a necessary tool to innovate the delivery of health care” (HIMSS, 2011, p. 2). School nurses need to be aware of and utilize telehealth when available to facilitate the delivery of health care in the school setting.

School-based telehealth includes using telephones, teleconferences, or web cameras in the school to connect to a distant healthcare provider. More sophisticated electronic monitoring equipment can be used in telehealth, such as an otoscope that transmits the image to a remote provider or stethoscope that transmits sounds with the goal of connecting a student with a distant health provider (The Children’s Partnership, 2009). Some school systems are experimenting and finding success with telehealth programs to extend the range of services in school health and decrease absenteeism for illness or disease-management encounters (Spooner& Gotlieb, 2007).

DESCRIPTION OF ISSUE

The use of telehealth is “increasing access to acute and specialty care for children; helping children and families manage chronic conditions; facilitating health education for children, families and school personnel; and increasing the capacity of school nurses and school-based health centers to meet the healthcare needs of students” (The Children’s Partnership, 2009, p. 2).

Telehealth includes a wide range of services delivered, managed, and coordinated by all health-related disciplines via exchange of electronic information and telecommunications technologies. The goal is that “telehealth (a term that has largely replaced *telemedicine*) will provide health care beyond diagnosis and treatment to include services that focus on health maintenance, disease prevention, and education” (Stokowski, 2008, p. 1). Telehealth includes both clinical and non-clinical uses. Examples of clinical telehealth are transmission of medical images for diagnoses, remote monitoring, and health advice by telephones such as teleradiology. Non-clinical telehealth includes distance education, health system integration, online information, and health data management (Stokowski, 2008).

Telehealth clearly has the potential to enhance health care of all students. Families in rural or low-income areas often face barriers and challenges in obtaining healthcare services for youth because of “travel distances, lack of transportation, inability to finance care, lack of healthcare insurance, and limited access to physicians. The use of telehealth in schools mitigates some of these difficulties and allows students access to medical care” (Burke, Ott, Albright, Bynum, & Hall-Barrow, 2008, p. 927).

The challenges related to telehealth technology include quality of service, confidentiality, standards, documentation process, protocols, follow-up, parental rights, liability, jurisdiction, and cost to implement and access equipment, school policies, and coordination of services. Therefore, school nurses must partner with the regulatory and professional agencies to implement, develop and use standards for safe and effective telehealth practice. Telehealth is emerging as a valuable way to “complement and expand the capacity of schools to meet the healthcare needs of children, particularly those who are low-income and living in medically underserved areas, while keeping them in school and their parents at work” (The Children’s Partnership, 2009, p. 2).

RATIONALE

Student health and educational performance are highly interdependent. It is well documented that healthy children perform better in school; therefore, school nurses have an important role in promoting the health of children (Bonaiuto, 2007; Engelke, Guttu, Warren, & Swanson, 2008).

Technology, including telehealth, has the potential to greatly expand the services provided by the school nurse but cannot and should not replace the school nurse. School nurses need to keep current with modern technology to support and enhance their clinical practice. The school nurse serves as a liaison between students, school personnel, family, community and healthcare providers to advocate for health care and a healthy school environment (American Nurses Association (ANA) and National Association of School Nurses (NASN), 2011) and the school nurse’s involvement is critical in the application of telehealth technology in the school setting (The Children’s Partnership, 2009).

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Please also see NASN's Position Statement on The Role of the School Nurse

<http://www.nasn.org/PolicyAdvocacy/PositionPapersandReports/NASNPositionStatementsFullView/tabid/462/ArticleId/87/Role-of-the-School-Nurse-Revised-2011>