



TELEHEALTH

PRACTICE DIRECTION

BACKGROUND

Practice directions set out the requirements related to specific aspects of registered psychiatric nursing practice and provide more detailed information related to the Health Professions Act, Registered Psychiatric Nursing Regulations, other relevant legislation, the Standards of Psychiatric Nursing Practice and Code of Ethics.

The intent of this practice direction is to define the expectations for Registered Psychiatric Nurses (RPNs) who are providing telehealth services to clients in other locations outside their own practice setting. Telehealth is defined as: “the use of technology to deliver care at a distance that includes not just delivery of health services at a distance but patient and health professional education, public health, and public administration (Daniel & Sulmasy, 2015). Telehealth is a rapidly growing piece of psychiatric nursing practice which can expand access to healthcare, enhance the psychiatric nurse-client collaboration, improve health outcomes, and reduce medical costs. However, these benefits must be measured against the potential risks and challenges associated with its use in psychiatric nursing practice (Daniel & Sulmasy, 2015).

Telehealth may include any or all of the following:

- Consultation
- Assessment and monitoring
- Health teaching/client education
- Diagnosis
- Treatment
- Professional Development
- Transfer of information

Practice Direction

Registered Psychiatric Nurses who provide or are contemplating the provision of telehealth services must be familiar with the benefits and risks of providing this type of service. RPNs in many practice settings may use telehealth to deliver psychiatric nursing services, provide education, assess client progress, obtain information, assess

outcomes, assess client records, and provide counseling and psychosocial intervention(s). Therefore, all RPNs must meet the primary guiding principles for telehealth services to be delivered.

Guiding Principles

1. Registered Psychiatric Nurses (RPNs) engaged in, or contemplating telehealth services must be registered and in good standing with the College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Alberta.
2. Registered Psychiatric Nurses (RPNs) engaged in, or contemplating telehealth services must act in accordance with the Health Professions Act, Registered Psychiatric Nurse Regulation, CRPNA Psychiatric Nursing Practice Standards and Code of Ethics; all relevant Alberta laws and statutes, federal legislation and organizational policies (where applicable); and
3. Registered Psychiatric Nurses (RPNs) engaged in the practice of telehealth are practicing psychiatric nursing in Alberta, regardless of where the client is located.
4. Registered Psychiatric Nurses (RPNs) are aware other provinces (jurisdictions) may have different requirements for healthcare providers providing telehealth services to their population and should seek guidance from that jurisdiction prior to providing services.

Applying the Principles to Practice

1. Duty to Care

The duty to care in a telehealth setting should follow the same principles as in a face-to-face interaction. The RPN is responsible to provide the client adequate, current, relevant, and ongoing care instructions. The RPN has taken steps to ensure that they are current and knowledgeable with respect to communication technologies and digital practice.

2. Suitability

The RPN needs to consider whether a client is suitable for telehealth services by contemplating a variety of factors, such as: level of physical care required, availability of support at the client site, ability of the client to participate (physical, mental, or cognitive barriers), familiarity with and limitations of the technology being utilized, and the desire to participate in telehealth consultation. If a crisis plan is needed that it is developed and can be implemented in remote locations.

3. Ethics

RPNs involved in telehealth services need to ensure they establish and maintain the therapeutic psychiatric nurse/client relationship. Effect communication is central to establishing a psychiatric nurse/client relationship when using information and telecommunication technologies, the RPN is expected to use strategies that reduce the risk of missing important information and must maintain the integrity and value of the psychiatric nurse/client relationship. RPNs must also be able to recognize when and where potential boundary violations may occur, when a telehealth approach may not be appropriate for the services being delivered and the scope of the practice of the RPN and the profession.

4. Competence

RPNs providing telehealth services must possess current and in-depth knowledge in the clinical area(s) relevant to the role. This may include having further education, training/orientation, licensure, and ongoing continuing education/professional development, to ensure the necessary knowledge and competencies for safe provision of quality psychiatric nursing service telehealth services.

5. Privacy, Confidentiality, and Informed Consent

The same principles of privacy, confidentiality and informed consent apply in a telehealth setting as they do in providing direct care. The RPN must ensure that informed consent is obtained before providing any telehealth service, that the RPN identifies clients at the onset of each consultation and that the identity of each client is confirmed prior to the delivery of any telehealth service. The RPN must also ensure that services are provided in such a manner that the client's privacy and confidentiality are maintained throughout.

6. Documentation and Client Records

The principles of document and access to client records do not change regardless of where or how the psychiatric nursing care/service is being delivered. The RPN providing telehealth services must be mindful of where and how documentation occurs and how access to client records can be obtained especially where multiple providers are involved. RPNs need to consider who is the keeper of the client's record and how information may be shared while delivering telehealth services and must abide by agency policy (where applicable). The client is informed what information, including information gained from communication technology will be documented on the client record.



RPN quick checklist:

- ☐ I am current and knowledgeable with respect to communication technology and digital practice including telehealth practice.
- ☐ I have reviewed my standards of psychiatric nursing practice and code of ethics and considered how they apply to my telehealth practice.
- ☐ I have reviewed any applicable privacy and other legislation and how they apply to telehealth.
- ☐ I have explained to my clients the limits of confidentiality and privacy, and taken steps to verify client identification each session.
- ☐ I am transparent with my clients about any information that will be communicated outside of the clinical setting.
- ☐ I have determined before providing telehealth sessions that an in-person assessment may or may not be necessary and whether remote services are appropriate.
- ☐ I have developed a crisis plan, when necessary, with clients to whom I am providing telehealth practice to.

RESOURCES

The Health Professions Act

The Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Alberta Regulation

Code of Ethics & Standards of Practice of Psychiatric Nursing in Alberta,
November 2022

Standard of Practice for Registered Psychiatric Nurses in the Provision of
Restricted Activities

Practice Note: Professional and Ethical: Communication Technology Practices
and Policies for a Digital World, College of Ontario Social Workers and Social
Service Workers, Author

Tele practice, College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Manitoba, Author

Tele practice and virtual care, College of Registered Nurses of Alberta, Author