POSITION STATEMENT
TELEHEALTH AND CONNECTED HEALTH

BACKGROUND

The United States is in the midst of a global pandemic from Covid-19, a highly contagious disease that has caused severe social, economic and cultural disruptions to everyday life in America. Telehealth, also referred to as Connected Health, has grown exponentially during this time as more services are being delivered and are eligible for reimbursement from public and private insurers. The Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) released new guidelines for telehealth in April, 2020 that encourage expansion of services to populations they cover. Examples from major Michigan healthcare systems include Michigan Medicine which conducted 444 virtual visits in February, 2020 and increased those to more than 20,000 visits by the end of April, 2020. Henry Ford Health System went from conducting 150 virtual visits per week to 10,000 virtual visits and report high patient satisfaction with this option.

Nearly 20% of Americans live in rural areas where there is a shortage of both providers and healthcare facilities. "The health consequences for communities that lack resources can be dire" states Joelle Fathi DNP RN ARNP CTTS, an expert on biobehavioral nursing and health informatics and a member of the 2018 ANA Steering Committee to revise its Core Principles of Telehealth. Fathi further states that connected health has value for patients in urban and major metropolitan areas. The expansion of healthcare services through connected health creates the opportunity to serve populations with care that is "necessary, timely, efficient, convenient and effective." (Moore & Trainum, 2019, p. 32).

The Affordable Care Act and the 2017 Health Care Act both support the use of telehealth and technology to expand access to care delivery. Tamara Broadnaux DNP RN NEA-BC, Clinical Operations, Department of Veterans Affairs states that "As providers move toward more value-based, shared saving, and accountable care models as required in healthcare reform, connected health provides better care coordination, management and communication with patients." (Moore & Trainum, 2019, p. 32).

In 2019, ANA released Core Principles on Connected Health (Principles) as a guide for healthcare professionals who use telehealth technologies to provide quality care. This document is an update to the 1998 ANA Core Principles on Telehealth and reflect the evolution of healthcare using a more interdisciplinary approach. There are 13 Principles within the guide that identify unique issues related to practice, regulatory, privacy, reimbursement, documentation and competencies. (ANA, 2019).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued Guidelines on using Telehealth to expand access to essential healthcare services during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. ANA recognizes that connected health provides a method of healthcare delivery that can improve access to quality health care when implementation is conducted using accepted standards and best available evidence. Nurses play an essential role in the adoption and use of connected health across care settings and roles and are well-positioned to lead in the adoption and use of care via these technologies.

DEFINITIONS

The American Nurses Association defines telehealth and Connect Health as "the use of electronic information and telecommunications technologies to support and promote long distance clinical health care, patient and professional health-related education, public health and health administration. Technologies include: videoconferencing, the

internet, store-and-forward imaging, streaming media, and terrestrial and wireless communication" ANA, n.d. While telehealth has been in existence for many years, it has grown exponentially recently due in part to need to deliver care virtually during the coronavirus pandemic.

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) (2020) define telehealth as "a two-way, real- time interactive communication between a patient and a physician or practitioner at a distant site through telecommunications equipment that includes, at a minimum, audio and visual equipment."
Several telehealth modalities allow providers and patients to connect using technology to deliver health care:

- Synchronous: This includes real-time telephone or live audio-video interaction typically with a patient using a smartphone, tablet, or computer.
  - In some cases, peripheral medical equipment (e.g., digital stethoscopes, otoscopes, ultrasounds) can be used by another HCP (e.g., nurse, medical assistant) physically with the patient, while the consulting medical provider conducts a remote evaluation.
- Asynchronous: This includes "store and forward" technology where messages, images, or data are collected at one point in time and interpreted or responded to later. Patient portals can facilitate this type of communication between provider and patient through secure messaging.
- Remote patient monitoring: This allows direct transmission of a patient's clinical measurements from a distance (may or may not be in real time) to their healthcare provider.
- Mobile Health (mHealth): This includes the use of mobile devices to support health care and public health information exchange. Information exchange using mHealth may include general educational information, targeted texts, and disease outbreak notifications.

Nurses have the background, skills and creative ingenuity to help patients effectively navigate and engage in telehealth modalities across the continuum of care.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Endorse the term telehealth and Connected Health, as this is the most widely used and accepted term used in national guidelines, by third party payors and most professional organizations
2. Adopt the 2019 ANA Core Principles on Connected Health.
3. Advocate to make permanent recent policy changes that reduce barriers to telehealth services and reimbursement at the state and national level.
4. Advocate for registered nurses (RN) and advance practice registered nurses (APRN) to be included in any legislation and to have access to telehealth platforms used by organizations
5. Advocate for the inclusion of telehealth content and experiences at all levels of registered nursing education.

REFERENCES:

American Nurses Association (2019, June 6). ANA core principles on connected health. Retrieved from https://www.nursingworld.org/~4a9307/globalassets/docs/ana/practice/ana-core-principles-on-connected-health.pdf

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