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THEME: Realizing Benefits Beyond Institutions

Lamps to Laptops: Transforming Care for Rural and Remote Patients

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Abstract

Over time, nurses have transitioned from using lamps to laptops in providing care to patients. The introduction of information and communication technologies (including Telehealth videoconferencing) has transformed how and where care can be delivered. As increasing numbers of patients in rural and remote areas are seeking consultation through Telehealth, nurses at the University Health Network (UHN) in Toronto, have been asked to play a leadership role in the design and implementation of Telehealth clinics to serve the diverse UHN patient needs.

Integrating nurses in a Telehealth coordinator role has resulted in a dramatic increase in clinical activity. In fiscal year 06-07, 947 clinical teleconsultations were conducted, compared with 284 in year 03-04 at program inception. Furthermore, operational resources were secured to increase human resource capacity from 1 to 3 nurse coordinators. Using their clinical expertise and nursing knowledge, these nurse coordinators employ a systematic structured approach to integrate Telehealth videoconferencing effectively in clinical areas, using clinical pathways and a patient centered philosophy as the foundation. This provides insight into both the appropriateness of the Telehealth solution and provider readiness whilst positively influencing the adoption of Telehealth and improving the patient experience.

In this presentation, the diverse role of Nurse Telehealth Coordinators from a clinical, administration, research, and educational perspective will be discussed; the global trends that impact health care delivery through Telehealth will be explored; and a systematic approach to effective program growth will be shared.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Sharon McGonigle, completed her undergraduate degree in Nursing from Ryerson University, Toronto and her MScN from D'Youville College in Buffalo, NY. She has extensive clinical experience in Cardio-vascular, Critical Care and Home Care Nursing. Sharon has a passion for technology that transforms the way nurses deliver care. She is a Patient Centered Care Champion at the University Health Network (Toronto, Canada) where she is a Telehealth Program Coordinator. Sharon's research focus is evaluating outcomes.