14.4: Telehealth and Telehomecare

Telehealth is an information and communication technology that allows for health services to be delivered over a distance using electronic or telecommunication devices. The benefit of using telehealth technology is that health care is accessible to all persons no matter where they reside. For example, the client may access this service in their community instead of travelling to see a specialist in a larger community. A nurse is available to the client throughout the appointment and provides care to the patient in various forms such as assessment or education. The nurse may perform a physical assessment and relay the results to the physician using telehealth technology. The nurse–client relationship continues as the nurse becomes involved with any education and support of the client throughout the assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation stages. All care is documented according to agency protocol. Client safety is an important consideration throughout each interaction. Nurses working with the client must follow standards and competencies of the professional association in the province in which they are located, regardless of where the client is situated. If the client is receiving long distance care, extra consideration and high level assessment skills are required as the nurse does not directly perform the physical assessment on the client. Thus, there is an increased safety risk related to incomplete assessments. Following agency protocol, privacy, and confidentiality are maintained throughout the nurse–patient interface.

Telehomecare is similar to telehealth. The difference between telehomecare and telehealth is that telehomecare refers to services provided to clients in their own homes. Clients receive devices and training to monitor their own vital signs at home. These vital signs are relayed to a health care provider through a phone line or the internet. Health care providers watch for trends in the data to alert the physician or nurse practitioner about the need for follow-up. The main benefit of telehomecare is that clients and caregivers are provided with additional supports, which lead to a greater sense of independence, fewer emergency department visits, and reduced flare-ups.
Essential Learning Activity 14.3.1

1. How can telehomecare help you care for your patients?
2. How can telehomecare assist family caregivers in caring for family with COPD or heart failure?