TELEHEALTH ESSENTIAL COMPETENCIES FOR PSYCHIATRIC NURSES IN CLINICAL PRACTICES

Mahir ayesh alenzi[1*], Salman Salem Alzahrani[2], Abdulaziz Ali Alzahrani[3], Naif Ahmed Alomari[4], Mamdouh Mashaal Alamri[5], Saeed Ibrahim Alshaikhi[6], Maha Abdullah Alenzi[7]

[1*]Erada complex and mental health, Eradah services, Mahiraa@moh.gov.sa
[2]Erada complex and mental health, Eradah services, Salzahrani199@moh.gov.sa
[3]Erada complex and mental health, Eradah services,, Aalzahrani500@moh.gov.sa
[4]Erada complex and mental health, Eradah services, Nalomery@moh.gov.sa
[5]Erada complex and mental health, Eradah services, malamri23@moh.gov.sa
[6]King Fahad General Hospital, Salshaikhi@moh.gov.sa
[7]Erada complex and mental health, Eradah services, Malenzi1@moh.gov.sa, Malenzi1@moh.gov.sa

*Corresponding Author: Mahir ayesh alenzi
*Erada complex and mental health, Eradah services, Mahiraa@moh.gov.sa

Abstract

Background: The integration of telehealth into psychiatric nursing has emerged as a pivotal advancement, particularly in response to the increasing need for accessible mental health services. This research synthesizes findings from recent studies to outline the telehealth competencies necessary for psychiatric mental health advanced practice nurses (PMH-APRNs).

Methods: A comprehensive critical analysis literature review was conducted, focusing on studies published between 2018 and 2022. Six key studies were identified through systematic searches in databases such as PubMed, PsycINFO, CINAHL, and the Cochrane Library. These studies were evaluated based on their contributions to understanding the telehealth competencies required in psychiatric nursing, encompassing technical, clinical, ethical, and communicative aspects.

Results: The review identified a broad spectrum of competencies essential for effective telehealth delivery in psychiatric nursing. These included technical skills for managing telehealth platforms, clinical skills adapted for the virtual environment, communication skills for remote patient engagement, cultural sensitivity to deliver equitable care, ethical considerations to navigate confidentiality and privacy in telehealth settings, and administrative proficiency. Despite the recognized importance of these competencies, a gap in formal education and training on telehealth within psychiatric nursing curricula was evident.

Conclusions: To harness the full potential of telehealth in psychiatric nursing, standardized competency frameworks must be developed and integrated into PMH-APRN curricula. Policymakers and healthcare institutions should collaborate to implement these frameworks and support ongoing professional development in telehealth competencies. Addressing the educational gap in telehealth can significantly enhance the accessibility, efficiency, and quality of mental health services.

Keywords: Telehealth, psychiatric nursing, PMH-APRN, telehealth competencies, mental health services, education, training.

Introduction

The introduction of telehealth into psychiatric nursing practice represents a transformative shift in the delivery of mental health services, offering unprecedented opportunities for expanding access, enhancing patient engagement, and improving clinical outcomes. This evolution, however, necessitates the development and integration of specific competencies among psychiatric nursing professionals to ensure the effective, ethical, and quality delivery of telehealth services. As the healthcare landscape continues to adapt to the technological advancements of the 21st century, the need for a structured framework that delineates the requisite competencies for telehealth in psychiatric nursing has become increasingly apparent. Research findings, such as those by Hilty et al. (2018), underscore the imperative to implement and evaluate telehealth competency frameworks across behavioral health professions to guarantee the provision of quality care.

The intersection of telehealth and psychiatric nursing practice encompasses a broad spectrum of competencies, ranging from technological proficiency to the nuanced understanding of patient-provider interactions in a virtual environment. Smith, Watts, and Moss (2018) have highlighted the pivotal role of simulation in educating nurses about telehealth, suggesting that experiential learning can significantly enhance telehealth nursing competencies. This approach not only facilitates the practical application of theoretical knowledge but also prepares nurses for the dynamic and sometimes unpredictable nature of telehealth consultations.

In addressing the needs of diverse populations, particularly in rural settings, telehealth emerges as a vital tool in bridging the gap in mental health service provision. Hilty et al. (2020) delve into the intricacies of telebehavioral health and cultural competencies, emphasizing the importance of adapting telehealth practices to meet the varied needs of diverse patient populations effectively. Such considerations are crucial in ensuring that telehealth services are accessible, equitable, and culturally sensitive, thereby enhancing clinical outcomes for all patients, regardless of their geographical or socio-cultural background.

The integration of telepsychiatry and other technological innovations into psychiatric care also necessitates a reevaluation of existing care models. Hilty et al. (2018) discuss the evidence base, best practice models, and competencies required for integrated care, highlighting the potential of telepsychiatry to complement traditional psychiatric services. By leveraging technology, healthcare providers can enhance care coordination, improve access to psychiatric services, and facilitate a holistic approach to mental health care.

Despite the promising advantages of telehealth, its adoption among psychiatric mental health advanced practice nurses (PMH-APNs) varies widely. Baird, Whitney, and Caedo (2018) explore the experiences and attitudes of PMH-APNs towards telemental health, revealing a spectrum of perspectives that range from enthusiastic adoption to cautious skepticism. Understanding these attitudes is crucial for identifying barriers to telehealth implementation and developing strategies to address them, ensuring that PMH-APNs are adequately prepared and supported in their telehealth endeavors.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further underscored the importance of telehealth in maintaining continuity of psychiatric care during times of crisis. Sasangohar et al. (2020) provide a practice perspective on adapting an outpatient psychiatric clinic to telehealth, illustrating the challenges and opportunities presented by the rapid shift to virtual care. This experience highlights the resilience and adaptability of psychiatric nursing practice in the face of unprecedented challenges, as well as the critical role of telehealth competencies in ensuring effective crisis response.

Moreover, the development of telehealth skills among healthcare professionals extends beyond psychiatric nursing to encompass the broader healthcare workforce. Galpin et al. (2021) emphasize the consensus among experts on the essential telehealth skills for healthcare professionals, suggesting a foundational skill set that is applicable across disciplines. This consensus points to the emerging

recognition of telehealth as a fundamental aspect of healthcare delivery, necessitating a standardized approach to telehealth education and training.

However, the attitudes of clinicians towards telehealth, especially in rural community mental health center settings, can significantly influence its adoption and effectiveness. McClellan et al. (2020) examine these attitudes, shedding light on the factors that may facilitate or hinder the integration of telehealth into routine psychiatric practice. Understanding these attitudes is vital for developing targeted interventions to promote the acceptance and effective use of telehealth among mental health professionals.

To sum up, the expansion of telehealth competencies in psychiatric nursing practice through research findings offers a promising pathway to enhancing the scope and quality of mental health services. The literature underscores the need for comprehensive competency frameworks, experiential learning opportunities, cultural sensitivity, and a holistic approach to telehealth implementation. As the field continues to evolve, ongoing research and evaluation will be critical in refining these competencies and maximizing the potential of telehealth in psychiatric nursing practice.

Rationale of the Study

The rationale behind the focused exploration of telehealth competencies within psychiatric nursing practice is deeply rooted in the confluence of healthcare innovation and the pressing need for accessible mental health services. This investigation emerges from the recognition of telehealth's potential to significantly expand access to psychiatric care, particularly in regions where such services have traditionally been limited. By delving into the specific competencies required for effective telehealth delivery, the study aims to empower psychiatric nurses to bridge the gap in mental health service provision, ensuring that more individuals can receive timely, effective, and culturally sensitive care, regardless of their geographic location.

Furthermore, the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has undeniably catapulted telehealth from a supplementary mode of care to a fundamental component of the healthcare delivery system. This seismic shift underscores the necessity of equipping psychiatric nursing professionals with the requisite skills and knowledge to navigate this new landscape. As the world gradually transitions to a post-pandemic reality, the relevance of telehealth competencies in psychiatric nursing cannot be overstated. This study seeks to contribute to the critical discourse on how telehealth can be seamlessly integrated into psychiatric nursing practices, thereby ensuring the sustainability of mental health services in any circumstance.

Additionally, the quality and continuity of care are paramount in the field of psychiatric nursing, where the therapeutic relationship and patient engagement are key to successful outcomes. Telehealth presents unique challenges and opportunities in this regard, necessitating a comprehensive understanding of the competencies that enable psychiatric nurses to maintain the efficacy of their practice in a virtual environment. Through this research, we aim to identify those competencies that are crucial for ensuring that the transition to telehealth not only preserves but enhances the quality of psychiatric care. By establishing a clear framework for telehealth competencies in psychiatric nursing, this study endeavors to lay the groundwork for a future where mental health services are more accessible, resilient, and adaptable to the needs of patients across the globe.

Method

Research Design: Comprehensive Critical Analysis Literature Review

This study adopts a comprehensive critical analysis literature review approach to investigate the telehealth competencies required in psychiatric nursing practice. This method involves systematically collecting, critically appraising, and synthesizing existing research findings on the topic. The objective is to identify, evaluate, and integrate the evidence surrounding telehealth competencies, thereby providing a robust framework that can inform practice, policy, and further research in the field of psychiatric nursing. This approach enables the exploration of both the breadth and depth of the existing literature, ensuring a holistic understanding of the competencies required for effective telehealth delivery in psychiatric nursing.

Literature Search Strategy
The literature search was meticulously planned and executed to ensure the inclusion of relevant, high-quality studies. The search covered major databases including PubMed, PsycINFO, CINAHL, and the Cochrane Library, focusing on literature published between 2018 and 2022. This time frame was chosen to ensure the relevance of the data in the context of rapid technological advancements and the recent surge in telehealth adoption due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Keywords and phrases used in the search included "telehealth competencies", "psychiatric nursing", "telepsychiatry", "telehealth in mental health nursing", and "telemedicine". Boolean operators (AND, OR) were employed to combine search terms effectively, maximizing the search strategy's breadth and specificity. The search was limited to peer-reviewed articles written in English to maintain the quality and accessibility of the analyzed literature.

Quality Assessment of the Studies
The quality of the included studies was assessed using standardized checklists adapted from the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) and the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) criteria. Each study was evaluated for its methodological rigor, relevance, and contribution to the field of telehealth competencies in psychiatric nursing. Factors such as study design, sample size, analytical methods, and the clarity of findings were considered. Studies that did not meet the predetermined quality criteria were excluded from the review to ensure the reliability and validity of the analysis.

Assessment of Risk Bias
The risk of bias in the included studies was systematically assessed using the Cochrane Collaboration's tool for assessing the risk of bias in randomized trials and the Risk Of Bias In Non-randomized Studies - of Interventions (ROBINS-I) tool for non-randomized studies. This assessment focused on several domains, including selection bias, performance bias, detection bias, attrition bias, reporting bias, and any other potential source of bias. The evaluation of bias risk was critical for interpreting the findings accurately and for understanding the strength of the evidence supporting telehealth competencies in psychiatric nursing.

Data Extraction and Analysis: Quantitative Synthesis of Evidence
Data extraction was conducted using a standardized form to collect information on study characteristics, methods, and findings related to telehealth competencies in psychiatric nursing. This process was performed independently by two reviewers to ensure accuracy and completeness. Discrepancies between reviewers were resolved through discussion or consultation with a third reviewer when necessary.
The analysis of extracted data involved a quantitative synthesis of evidence, focusing on identifying common themes, trends, and gaps in the research. Statistical methods, such as meta-analysis, were considered but ultimately deemed inappropriate due to the expected heterogeneity of study designs and outcomes. Instead, a narrative synthesis approach was employed, allowing for the comprehensive integration of findings across diverse study types. This method facilitated the identification of core competencies, as well as insights into the implementation and evaluation of telehealth in psychiatric nursing practice. The synthesis aimed to highlight areas of consensus, divergence, and emerging directions for future research and practice development.

Results
The burgeoning integration of telehealth within psychiatric nursing practices underscores a pivotal transformation in delivering mental health services. This shift, propelled by technological advancements and the increasing need for accessible mental health care, has catalyzed a series of studies investigating the competencies required for effective telehealth deployment. Among these, six studies stand out, conducted between 2017 and 2020, offering invaluable insights into the experiences, attitudes, and readiness of psychiatric mental health advanced practice nurses (PMH-APRNs) towards telehealth. These studies collectively explore a spectrum of themes from the

implementation of teleprecepting in nurse practitioner training, the use of telehealth in practice, to the attitudes towards and the impact of telehealth on clinical training and patient care. By examining the methodologies, findings, and implications of these studies, we gain a comprehensive understanding of the current landscape and the future directions of telehealth competencies in psychiatric nursing practice.

Characteristics of the Included Studies

The analysis of telehealth competencies in psychiatric nursing underscores the evolving landscape of mental health service delivery. The studies included in this review span a period from 2017 to 2020, providing a recent snapshot of the field's advancements and challenges. These investigations collectively illuminate the experiences, attitudes, and readiness of psychiatric mental health advanced practice nurses (PMH-APRNs) regarding telehealth, offering insights into teleprecepting, implementation practices, and the broader implications of telehealth in psychiatric nursing.

Table 1: Summary of Included Studies

Study ID	Author(s)	Year	Focus of Study	Key Findings
1	Baird et al.	2017	Experiences and attitudes towards TMH among PMH-APRNs.	Majority had no prior education or training in TMH but expressed a desire for TMH education.
2	Johnson et al.	2020	Readiness for teleprecepting in PMH nurse practitioner training.	Teleprecepting viewed as viable for increasing access to clinical training.
3	Hilty et al.	2021	Competencies needed for effective telehealth practice in diverse populations.	Emphasized the importance of telebehavioral and cultural competencies.
4	Galpin et al.	2021	Telehealth skills for health care professionals.	Identified a consensus on essential telehealth skills across healthcare professions.
5	McClellan et al.	2020	Clinician telehealth attitudes in a rural mental health center setting.	Highlighted the influence of clinician attitudes on the adoption and effectiveness of telehealth.
6	Sasangohar et al.	2020	Adapting an outpatient psychiatric clinic to telehealth during the COVID-19 pandemic.	Showed successful adaptation strategies and underscored the critical role of telehealth competencies.

The studies reveal a consensus on the significant role of telehealth in expanding access to psychiatric services, especially in underserved areas. While the readiness and attitudes towards telehealth vary among professionals, there is a clear call for formal education and training in telehealth competencies. These findings underscore the need for systematic evaluation and development of practice guidelines to enhance the efficacy and quality of telehealth services in psychiatric nursing.

The critical evaluation of telehealth competencies in psychiatric nursing from the reviewed studies highlights a dynamic framework necessary for the effective integration of telehealth into mental health services. These competencies span across technical, clinical, ethical, and communicative domains, addressing the multifaceted requirements for psychiatric nursing professionals engaged in telehealth practices. The consolidation of findings from these studies underscores the necessity for a comprehensive skill set that ensures quality care, ethical considerations, and effective patient engagement in a virtual setting.

Table 2: Identified Telehealth Competencies Across Studies

Competency Category	Baird et al. (2017)	Johnson et al. (2020)	Hilty et al. (2021)	Galpin et al. (2021)	McClellan et al. (2020)	Sasangohar et al. (2020)
Technical Skills	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Clinical Skills	✓	✓	✓			✓
Communication	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Cultural Sensitivity			✓			
Ethical Considerations	✓		✓			✓
Administrative Proficiency		✓			✓	✓
Telebehavioral Competencies			✓			
Crisis Intervention		✓				✓
Patient Engagement		✓		✓		✓

This table reflects a comprehensive overview of the competencies deemed essential for psychiatric nurses utilizing telehealth technologies. The competencies identified include the foundational technical skills required to operate telehealth platforms effectively, clinical skills tailored to virtual environments, and communication strategies specific to telehealth interactions. Additionally, cultural sensitivity and ethical considerations are highlighted, emphasizing the importance of delivering culturally competent care and maintaining patient confidentiality and privacy in a telehealth setting. The findings further reveal an emphasis on administrative proficiency and telebehavioral competencies, underscoring the need for nurses to navigate the administrative aspects of telehealth and adapt their behavioral health interventions to the virtual medium. Crisis intervention and patient engagement competencies were also identified, pointing to the necessity of being able to effectively manage emergencies and maintain therapeutic relationships remotely.

These identified competencies form a robust framework for guiding the development of telehealth training programs for psychiatric nurses, ensuring they are well-equipped to meet the demands of modern mental health service delivery.

Discussion
The integration of telehealth into psychiatric nursing practice has emerged as a critical development in response to the growing demand for accessible mental health services. This shift, as revealed by the studies reviewed, necessitates a comprehensive set of competencies for psychiatric mental health advanced practice nurses (PMH-APRNs) engaged in telehealth. The identified competencies span technical, clinical, ethical, and communicative domains, underscoring the multifaceted nature of telehealth services.

The prominence of technical skills across the studies highlights the foundational importance of mastering the digital tools and platforms that facilitate telehealth (Baird et al., 2017; Johnson et al., 2020). This competency is not just about operating software but also involves troubleshooting technical issues and ensuring the reliability of telehealth sessions. The necessity for such skills underscores the evolving role of PMH-APRNs, who must now also possess a level of technical proficiency that was previously outside the scope of traditional nursing roles.

Clinical skills adapted to the telehealth environment emerged as another critical competency. These skills encompass not only the ability to assess, diagnose, and treat patients remotely but also to adapt clinical judgment to the nuances of telehealth (Hilty et al., 2021; Sasangohar et al., 2020). This adaptation is crucial for maintaining the quality of care and ensuring that the therapeutic outcomes achieved through telehealth are comparable to those of in-person services.

Effective communication in a telehealth setting, as highlighted by several studies, involves more than just verbal exchanges; it requires an awareness of non-verbal cues and the ability to build rapport with patients through a screen (McClellan et al., 2020; Galpin et al., 2021). This competency is particularly important given the potential for miscommunication in the absence of physical presence, underscoring the need for PMH-APRNs to develop heightened communication skills tailored to the virtual medium.

Cultural sensitivity and ethical considerations in telehealth, as identified in the literature, emphasize the importance of delivering care that is not only respectful of diverse cultural backgrounds but also adheres to ethical standards in a digital context (Hilty et al., 2021). These competencies are essential for navigating the complexities of consent, confidentiality, and privacy in telehealth, ensuring that patients' rights and dignity are upheld.

The emphasis on administrative proficiency and telebehavioral competencies reflects the operational and behavioral adaptations required for effective telehealth practice (Johnson et al., 2020; McClellan et al., 2020). These competencies include managing telehealth logistics, understanding regulatory and reimbursement policies, and applying best practices in telebehavioral health, highlighting the broad skill set required of PMH-APRNs in a telehealth context.

Crisis intervention competency is particularly pertinent in telehealth, where the physical distance between the nurse and the patient can pose unique challenges in emergencies (Sasangohar et al., 2020). PMH-APRNs must be adept at recognizing signs of crisis and responding effectively, despite the limitations imposed by the telehealth format.

Patient engagement in a telehealth setting demands a set of skills that foster therapeutic alliances and encourage active participation in care (Galpin et al., 2021; Sasangohar et al., 2020). This competency is crucial for overcoming the potential barriers to engagement posed by the virtual format, ensuring that patients feel connected and supported throughout their telehealth experience.

The comprehensive analysis of telehealth competencies required for psychiatric nursing practice illuminates the depth and breadth of skills necessary to navigate this evolving landscape. The integration of these competencies into educational and training programs for PMH-APRNs is imperative for harnessing the full potential of telehealth in expanding access to and enhancing the quality of mental health services.

Conclusion

The transition towards telehealth in psychiatric nursing practice is not merely a trend but a necessary evolution in response to the growing need for accessible and efficient mental health services. The identified competencies encompassing technical skills, clinical acumen, communication proficiency, cultural sensitivity, ethical considerations, and more, outline a comprehensive framework essential for PMH-APRNs to deliver quality care in a virtual environment. As the healthcare landscape continues to shift towards digital modalities, embedding these competencies into the core of psychiatric nursing education and ongoing professional development becomes imperative. Ensuring that PMH-APRNs are well-equipped with these competencies will not only enhance the delivery of telehealth services but also significantly contribute to bridging the gap in mental health access, ultimately leading to improved patient outcomes and satisfaction.

Recommendations

To optimize the benefits of telehealth in psychiatric nursing and address the current gaps in practice and education, policymakers and healthcare institutions must collaboratively develop and implement standardized telehealth competency frameworks for psychiatric mental health advanced practice nurses (PMH-APRNs). These frameworks should encompass the full spectrum of identified competencies, including technical, clinical, communicative, and ethical skills tailored to telehealth delivery. Additionally, the integration of telehealth training modules within PMH-APRN curricula, supported by policy incentives and continuing education opportunities, is crucial for preparing a workforce adept at navigating the digital healthcare landscape. Policymakers should also advocate for and facilitate the development of telehealth practice guidelines that ensure patient safety, privacy, and equitable access to mental health services. These strategic recommendations can pave the way for a more robust, effective, and accessible telehealth infrastructure in psychiatric nursing practice.

References

1. Baird, M. B., Whitney, L., & Caedo, C. E. (2017). Experiences and attitudes among psychiatric mental health advanced practice nurses in the use of telemental health: Results of an online survey. *Journal of the American Psychiatric Nurses Association, 24*(3), 235-240. https://doi.org/10.1177/1078390317717330
2. Galpin, K., Sikka, N., King, S. L., Horvath, K. A., Shipman, S. A., & AAMC Telehealth Advisory Committee. (2021). Expert consensus: Telehealth skills for health care professionals. *Telemedicine and e-Health, 27*(7), 820-824. https://doi.org/10.1089/tmj.2020.0359
3. Hilty, D. M., Gentry, M. T., McKean, A. J., Cowan, K. E., Lim, R. F., & Lu, F. G. (2021). Telehealth for rural diverse populations: Telebehavioral and cultural competencies, clinical outcomes and administrative approaches. *Mhealth, 6*. https://doi.org/10.21037/mhealth.2020.02.03

4. Hilty, D. M., Maheu, M. M., Drude, K. P., & Hertlein, K. M. (2018). The need to implement and evaluate telehealth competency frameworks to ensure quality care across behavioral health professions. *Academic Psychiatry, 42*(6), 818-824.

5. Hilty, D. M., Sunderji, N., Suo, S., Chan, S., & McCarron, R. M. (2018). Telepsychiatry and other technologies for integrated care: evidence base, best practice models and competencies. *International Review of Psychiatry, 30*(6), 292-309.

6. Johnson, D. S., Ling, A., & Melino, K. (2020). Exploring readiness for teleprecepting in psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner training. *Journal of the American Psychiatric Nurses Association, 26*(5), 470-475. https://doi.org/10.1177/1078390320948127

7. McClellan, M. J., Florell, D., Palmer, J., & Kidder, C. (2020). Clinician telehealth attitudes in a rural community mental health center setting. *Journal of Rural Mental Health, 44*(1), 62-72. https://doi.org/10.1037/rmh0000132

8. Sasangohar, F., Bradshaw, M. R., Carlson, M. M., Flack, J. N., Fowler, J. C., Freeland, D., ... & Madan, A. (2020). Adapting an outpatient psychiatric clinic to telehealth during the COVID-19 pandemic: A practice perspective. *Journal of Medical Internet Research, 22*(10), e22523. https://doi.org/10.2196/22523

9. Smith, T. S., Watts, P., & Moss, J. A. (2018). Using simulation to teach telehealth nursing competencies. *Journal of Nursing Education, 57*(10), 624-627.