

Telenursing Grows in Popularity as Commuting Costs Soar

Experienced nurses, frustrated with the high cost and hassle of a daily commute, are now delivering care from the comfort of their own homes. Known as telenursing, this type of delivery reduces commuting costs and makes nurses more accessible to patients who need medical advice. While the cost varies based on the length of your commute, the fuel efficiency of your vehicle, and the fees you pay for parking and tolls, it's no secret that commuting is expensive. Commuting 250 miles per week will cost you approximately \$140 per month if you average 25 miles per gallon. However, that figure doesn't include the cost of extra wear and tear on your vehicle. Depending on the road conditions in your area, you may need to replace your brakes, tires, and other car parts more frequently than those who with shorter commutes.

Eliminating a daily commute also has several health benefits. People who commute long distances have an increased risk of developing cancer, diabetes, and hypertension. Long commutes also increase the likelihood of becoming overweight or obese. Working from home gives nurses the opportunity to eat healthier meals and exercise more frequently. Many experienced nurses also enjoy the autonomy of working from home, choosing cases, and setting their own schedules.

Nursing Applications

Telenursing has two major practical applications in the field. The first is providing patient consultations or following up with patients after medical procedures or the start of new treatment regimens. Patients use telephones or web-based technology to connect with nurses and share information. Some companies create virtual clinics, giving patients direct access to nursing professionals. This type of telenursing is especially beneficial for those who live in rural communities and have difficulty accessing medical care. Remote monitoring is also possible with telecommuting technology. Telenursing tools make it possible to receive blood pressure measurements, blood sugar readings, and other data from patients, reducing the number of in-home visits necessary to monitor their health. Telenurses serve more patients each day, as they completely eliminate travel time from their schedules.

Required Competencies

In addition to clinical competency and assessment skills, telenurses also need a number of specific skills and abilities related to technology. The ability to connect to the Internet and use basic productivity tools is essential, as telenurses are expected to document their efforts. Telenurses should also be able to use videoconferencing equipment, digital cameras, and other equipment used to enhance patient education. Strong communication skills are a must, as working with patients via telephone or Internet takes away the opportunity to use body language and other nonverbal cues to help determine a patient's needs.

Career Preparation

Those interested in a telenursing career should prepare themselves by taking additional courses in health informatics, health information management, or nursing technology. Many community

and technical colleges offer professional development courses in basic computer skills such as navigating a Windows computer environment, communicating via e-mail, and using popular software programs for word processing and database management. Learning a foreign language may also be helpful, as you may work with people from other countries.

Telenursing Risks

Despite the many benefits of telenursing, it also has risks. There's always a possibility that equipment will fail, leaving patients without access to much-needed monitoring and support. Employers try to minimize this risk by performing frequent equipment maintenance and backing up patient data, but they can't guarantee that computers, telephones, and other equipment will never fail. The confidentiality of patient health records is also a concern. This increases the risk that others will access medical data or health insurance information. Telenurses may also need additional professional liability insurance if they work with clients in other states or countries.