



## Telenursing - An Evolving World of Care

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**Background.** Many challenges face rural healthcare clinicians. A primary goal of healthcare reform is increasing access to healthcare for populations that have long been underserved, including minorities, rural community residents, the poor, and the previously uninsured. Expansion of technology-enhanced healthcare promises to further decrease healthcare costs, increase service reach, and improve patient healthcare outcomes, particularly in rural areas. Many challenges still lie ahead, however, as large numbers of people begin to seek the services of primary healthcare practitioners. Additional challenges arise from the constant evolution of technology. A significant benefit of telehealth is that it promotes patient-centered healthcare, thereby making an important contribution to quality. Nurses are partners and leaders in changing the rural healthcare delivery system, and telenursing, as a subset of telehealth, is evolving to improve patient healthcare outcomes. **Purpose.** The purpose of this inquiry was to explore the current and emerging state of telehealth applications in rural healthcare delivery and the effect of telenursing practice on patient healthcare outcomes. **Method.** Three main databases were systematically searched for journal articles from 2010 to 2014 on this topic. The databases selected were the Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), Health Source, and MEDLINE. Search terms used included rural, telehealth, and telenursing. The search yielded 113 papers, of which 12 met the inclusion criteria for peer-reviewed articles written in English. **Findings.** The findings from the academic literature and other relevant works are summarized in four major themes: (a) current and emerging telehealth applications in rural areas, (b) benefits and barriers to telehealth, (c) telenursing's positive contributions to patient health care outcomes, and (d) implications for future nursing education, practice, and policies. The results demonstrate that telehealth technologies continue to evolve to improve patient care outcomes in rural areas by decreasing readmission and mortality rates, increasing patient engagement, and improving adherence to healthcare regimens. Despite acknowledged limitations, a growing body of evidence demonstrates that patients in underserved areas can benefit from telehealth interventions led and delivered by nurses. The literature review and the increasing demands for telehealth services suggest a number of recommendations for evolving telenursing education, leadership, and practice. **Conclusion.** Technology in healthcare is rapidly changing and impacts nurses' partnership roles in the rural healthcare delivery system. Nurses can contribute considerable practice expertise to enhance telehealth interventions and improve patient healthcare outcomes in underserved rural communities. Further research should investigate the training and practice of telehealth nurses in rural areas and effective methods of creating successful practice partnerships in telehealth.

