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Technology for Faith Community Nursing Practice

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Introduction

Faith Community Nursing, with its focus on intentional care of the spirit, has long been a practice of interpersonal, face-to-face interactions with clients where the nurse and the client shared information in a private or semi-private setting. So how does the Faith Community Nurse (FCN) engage with a person to offer care to their body, mind, and spirit when social distancing/isolation is in effect? Since the year 2020, many FCNs, even those who never considered themselves a “Techie” before, have embraced technology as a tool to help them stay connected to those they serve. Technology offers opportunities for FCNs to expand their outreach to connect with even more clients (Zerull et al., 2009). This article will explore some of those opportunities and how to continue using technology to improve Faith Community Nursing practice.

Organization

Online Calendars and Planners

The first step to utilizing technology to organize your Faith Community Nursing practice is the use of an online calendar. Both Microsoft, Google, and Apple have their own versions. There are a variety of digital planners available also. Once your calendar is set up, you can access it both on your computer at home and on your smartphone when you are on the go. Education opportunities, meetings, client appointments, and personal appointments will all be easily accessible.

Apps for Notes and Reminders

Notes and Reminders apps allow you to create lists that will be available whenever you have your smartphone with you. This prevents forgetting the list placed on the kitchen counter where you “won’t forget it.” Checklists for shared projects can be shared from these apps via email. Setting reminders will help you stay on task by alerting you when an item on your checklist is due.

Productivity Apps

Another option for better organization is Productivity Apps. There are several options out there, so it is a good idea to explore those options to find the one that is the best fit for you. Microsoft and Google have their own versions but there are several others available. A productivity app should make it fast and easy to organize your tasks in multiple ways; by the list, by the project, or when the task is due.

Emails

Most email providers have a scheduling option so you can write the email and then schedule it to go out at a different time. This is useful for sending out routine emails to clients to update them on planned educational meetings, office hours, or to share current wellness information with them. If you routinely send out your emails every Friday, instead of sitting down to write and send the email every Friday, you could write a month or more worth of emails and schedule each of them to go out the week in which they are planned.

Spreadsheets

Spreadsheets are another option for organizing your Faith Community Nursing Practice. Excel spreadsheets, for example, offer numerous templates for budgeting, planning, calendar design, creating lists, project timelines, volunteer assignments, meal or medication planners, and planning for events. Google Sheets is another option for those who are more comfortable with Google products. Both offer options for real-time collaboration if there are others in your ministry with whom you need to collaborate and share information. Spreadsheets also offer tools for creating charts and graphs to display your information more visually. Spreadsheets can be password protected for client privacy.

Education

One of the blessings that came from the pandemic is that virtual continuing education units (CNEs) can be obtained 24/7. Zoom, Facebook live, Microsoft Teams, BlueJeans, Google Meet, and YouTube are sites where webinars can be hosted. Virtual Conferences are making networking and conference resources available to those who could not travel to conferences in the past. Someone in America could attend a meeting sponsored by the Australian Faith Community Nurses Association or someone in Australia could attend an event hosted in America or Canada. Webinars can be recorded and offered for viewing later.

These same tools allow FCNs to offer educational meetings to clients. Speakers from across the country or world can be invited in to share current information. Nurses who found it difficult to include clients with limited transportation options or those unable to drive after dark in educational meetings can offer more inclusive options now. Hybrid meetings where some people attend in person and others attend virtually are another way to make information more accessible.

Leaders in evidence-based practices such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, World Health Organization, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and American Nurses Association offer free CNEs, round-table discussions, journals, and webinars. FCNs can attend to get the most current information on diseases like COVID-19, Monkeypox, or the March 2022 polio outbreak in New York. This allows the FCN to offer guidance in their own communities on how to prevent disease transmission, treat those infected, and protect those at risk. In the United States, the U.S. Surgeon General, Mental Health America, National Alliance on Mental Illness, and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services of America have been offering free toolkits and webinars to better inform the public on mental health to reduce stigma and improve outcomes. The White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships has weekly webinars where nurses can stay up to date on how current legislature might impact their communities. Similarly, the White House Office of Public Engagement releases frequent Health Community Updates. Signing up for these organizations' email lists will help the FCN stay abreast of current health information. Other disease specific organizations like the American Cancer Society offer patient-friendly guides online to help clients be better informed about treatment options and questions to ask their doctors.

Collaboration and Networking

As mentioned earlier, emails, spreadsheets, and office software of all types offer FCNs multiple options for collaborating with others regardless of their physical distance. These tools partnered with social media platforms, like Facebook, YouTube, or LinkedIn, also offer opportunities to build larger networks with fellow FCNs, Health Ministers, Faith Community Nursing organizations, and medical professionals. Joining email subscription lists for health-related organizations, taking part in conversations or groups on those organizations' social media pages, and attending live social media events give the FCN many opportunities to make their work known or to get feedback from others doing similar work.

Client Services

FCNs can participate in telehealth with clients using phone conversations, texting, emailing, online meeting platforms or face timing on their smartphone. Clients can be referred to websites that offer current evidence-based practices in easy-to-understand language. Apps that help track health and wellness information for free can be recommended.

Self-care

The same spreadsheets, planners, and apps that can be used for organizing a FCN's practice can also be used to track a person's health and wellness. Information about medications, doctor appointments, meal diaries, blood glucose, blood pressure, and hospitalizations can be included. All health information can be tracked to help anyone be a better historian at medical appointments.

Fitness trackers help remind you to get up and move throughout the day, check heart rate, track the number of steps taken throughout the day, offer breathing exercises, monitor the duration and quality of sleep, time exercises to calculate calories burned, and offer food diaries to monitor calorie intake.

There is an App for practically everything. Meditation, breathing exercises, medication look-up for side-effects, adverse effects, and contraindications with other medications taken, food diaries, food planners, prayer, Bible study, positive affirmations, and many more options are available on a person's smart phone to track and plan personal wellness efforts.

Privacy, Reliability, and Security

It is always important to protect Patient Health Information. Texting, emailing, or sharing health information with the wrong person would be a breach of privacy and of the client's trust. Just as when administering meds, it is wise to check three times to make sure you are delivering information to the person intended. Telehealth.HHS.gov offers sound advice for clients on what telehealth is and how to protect confidential information when communicating virtually.

The FCN should ensure that they are in an area where others cannot see or hear the conversation with the client over the phone. Cell phones make it much easier for those around you to hear your conversation unless you are using headphones or a Bluetooth earpiece to listen. A busy grocery store or coffee shop for instance would offer too many opportunities for someone

to listen in on the conversation or look over the FCN's shoulder to see what is displayed on their laptop. Likewise, conversations in the nurse's home surrounded by family members would be a breach of privacy if those family members were able to hear and see the information shared. If you step away from your computer, you should make sure nobody can see client information on it first.

Before using any technology or virtual products, take the time to read reviews left by other users of the product. This will help you determine if it is the right product for you. Check to see if the problems others experience might prevent you from using the product in the way you planned. In addition, determine if the company offering the product is responsible for maintaining security of information and if they are responsive in correcting any issues that are experienced. User reviews also offer information on how frequently the software is updated and if those updates tend to cause problems or are helpful with problems experienced prior to the updates. Some products have a free version that offers limited capabilities compared to the pay-for-use versions. User reviews will often compare the difference between the free and the pay-for-use versions to help decide if the investment is worthwhile.

Challenges

One of the biggest challenges for FCNs who want to use technology is serving clients in rural areas where internet and cell phone access is limited or non-existent. Similarly, some clients may not be able to afford internet or cellphone services. In America, the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy continues to explore making telehealth options more accessible in rural areas and offers information on telehealth and broadband funding resources.

Another issue is the FCN who is uncomfortable using technology. There are numerous options for learning more about technology. Some senior centers offer classes as do local colleges. An online search will retrieve an abundance of how-to articles and videos. Young people who have grown up using the latest technology are often very helpful when asked for advice. Also consider finding your local hackerspace where people meet to explore technology and internet services.

Finally, the FCN must consider that not all products work for all people or on all platforms. If one FCN uses Microsoft products and another uses Apple or Google products, they may have difficulty collaborating on a project while using products with which they are unfamiliar. The same goes for clients or other Health Ministry members. Some products only work on certain browsers. You may use Firefox and have a program that works well for you while a colleague who uses Chrome or Edge may not have the same success.

Summary

The suggestions mentioned in this article are a small sampling of ways technology can enhance a FCN's practice. With a little time and effort toward exploring technology, you may find that what once seemed like your worst enemy will become your best friend in organizing and accomplishing your Faith Community Nursing goals.

References

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