

Occupational Therapy Telehealth in the North Dakota

Telehealth, also known as Telemedicine, is the use of medical information exchanged from one site to another via electronic communications to improve a patient's clinical health status. (1)

AOTA defines Telehealth as the application of evaluative, consultative, preventative, and therapeutic services delivered through telecommunication and information technologies. (2)

North Dakota uses federal definitions for "internet" and "practice of telemedicine" set in the Ryan Haight Online Pharmacy Consumer Protection Act of 2008. (3)

Telemedicine means the practice of medicine by a practitioner, other than a pharmacist, who is at a location remote from the patient, and is communicating with the patient, or health care professional who is treating the patient, using a telecommunications system. (4) Telehealth is a service delivery model that allows an occupational therapy practitioner to deliver evaluation, treatment, and consultation through telecommunication and information technologies overcoming distance, transportation expenses, and patient access barriers.

Telehealth in OT practice

According to AOTA Position Paper on Telehealth: By removing barriers to accessing care, including social stigma, travel, and socioeconomic and cultural barriers, the use of telehealth as a service delivery model within occupational therapy leads to improved access to care and ameliorates the impact of personnel shortages in underserved areas. Occupational therapy outcomes aligned with telehealth include the facilitation of occupational performance, adaptation, health and wellness, prevention, and quality of life.

The same ethical and professional standards that apply to in-person delivery of occupational therapy services also apply to the delivery of services by means of telehealth technologies. Occupational therapy practitioners should refer to the Occupational Therapy Code of Ethics and Ethics Standards (2010) (AOTA, 2010a).

Providing Occupational Therapy services via technology:

The North Dakota Occupational Therapy Practice Act authorizes the use of Telehealth:

ND Chapter 55.5-03-01-03 Scope of Services

55.5-03-01-03. Specific occupational therapy services. The practice of occupational therapy means the therapeutic use of occupations, including everyday life activities with individuals, groups, populations, or organizations to support participation, performance, and function in roles and situations in home, school, workplace, community, and other settings. Occupational therapy services are provided for habilitation, rehabilitation, and the promotion of health and wellness, including methods delivered via telerehabilitation to those who have or are at risk for developing an illness, injury, disease, disorder, condition, impairment, disability, activity limitation, or participation restriction. Occupational therapy addresses the physical, cognitive, psychosocial, sensory-perceptual, and other aspects of performance in a variety of contexts and environments to support engagement in occupations that affect physical and mental health, well-being, and quality of life.

Telehealth is not a separate service. It is a medium to deliver care. Occupational Therapy practitioners must adhere to the same standards as expected for on-site service delivery. Interventions with physical assessment feedback may not be easily determined through a telehealth encounter. Each practitioner must assess and determine if the service delivery method of telehealth meets the standard for each patient encounter situation using their clinical reasoning and ethical judgement.

All legal, regulatory and ethical rules apply consistent with an on-site service. Confidentiality and HIPAA compliance with network connection security in place for video and non-video connections is an important factor.

An occupational therapy practitioner is required to be licensed in North Dakota if the practitioner provides occupational therapy services to a client who is in North Dakota. The location of the patient at the time of the patient service encounter determines the location of the service. If the patient is located in North Dakota at the time of the patient service, the therapist/assistant must be licensed in North Dakota. If the therapists/assistant is connecting with a patient located in another State at the time of the patient encounter, the therapist must be licensed in that State.

Chapter 55.5-02-03-01.1 Supervision: Definitions

“Direct supervision” means face-to-face contact, including observation, modeling, co-treatment, discussions, teaching and video teleconferencing.

“Indirect supervision” means other than face-to-face contact, including phone, written and electronic exchanges using telecommunication technology.

Using technology in the supervision of Occupational Therapy personnel:

An occupational therapy practitioner may provide occupational therapy personnel supervision requiring direct supervision and indirect supervision through electronic medical record technology and video teleconferencing. The practitioner will be responsible for the appropriate use of teleconferencing mediums in the supervision of services and maintain the privacy standards in all patient related interactions.

Resources.

1. <http://www.americantelemed.org/about-telemedicine/what-is-telemedicine#.VXYNsc9Viko>
American Telemedicine Association’s Telerehabilitation Special Interest Group/Resources, www.americantelemed.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3328 ctg
2. <http://www.aota.org/-/media/Corporate/Files/Secure/Practice/OfficialDocs/Position/Telehealth-Position-2013.PDF>
3. ND Century Code, Sec. 19-02.1-15.1
4. Ryan Haight Online Pharmacy Consumer Protection Act of 2008 [Pub. L. 110-425; 21 U.S.C. 802-803]