



Telecare and telemedicine are emerging professions

Public understanding of health issues is increasing, right along with public concern. Rapidly advancing technology has produced devices and platforms packed with pictures, graphics and sound that whisk us to new levels of global communication.

Telehealth is a recent addition to the professional lexicon, and those who master the skill sets at the nexus of media, communication and psychology will lead the way. In fact, we will recognize our future healthcare leaders by their exceptional understanding of human behavior.

Here's a look at opportunities in psychology that are related to telehealth.

Many believe the opportunity and potential to improve world health is just a phone call away. "The ability to use media to improve public health is the newest breakthrough for broad-scale progress," says Deborah Waters, M.D. and former chief physician for the U.S. Olympic Committee.

Waters now lives on the Shiprock Navajo Reservation in New Mexico and is completing her Ph.D. in media psychology. She is researching the use of medicine, psychology and media to decrease health risks associated with obesity and diabetes among Native American youth. Waters says, "Combining psychology, media and medical information will improve the health of

this population. We have a great new opportunity to overcome cultural dissonance, and use what we have learned as a force for good. Understanding means a lot."

Telehealth describes multiple endeavors

Telehealth is a research area that combines medicine, health information and telecommunications. It includes understanding the communication devices in use, the people who use them and the ways in which they are being used. Telehealth also researches effectiveness – what works and what doesn't. It's an umbrella that spans telecare, telemedicine and other aspects of e-health. To its enthusiastic practitioners, the "e" in e-health is interchangeable with electronic, as well as exceptional, elevated, extended, and any other "e" that implies progress in world health. Ronald Giannetti is dean of the school of psychology at Fielding Graduate University. He is fond of the analogy, "Media is the syringe and psychology is the serum."

The American Psychological Association (APA) recently identified specific professional opportunities in telehealth that include:

- Improving public understanding of medical and health-related matters.
- Writing or speaking on health topics in various media.
- Improving product and service design with iconography and semiotic applications.
- Enhancing clinical practice, public health, medical education and training with new media applications.
- Developing telehealth materials for challenged populations.
- Constructing media simulations for medical education.

Only the beginning

The emerging global telehealth opportunity is highly audio visual. Media psychology enhances communication, and produces new solutions. For example, former FBI agent Jack Shafer is the creator of a new method of text-based analysis that reveals whether a

person is lying or telling the truth. "I can develop specific techniques to help healthcare professionals evaluate the integrity of the information they receive from patients," says Shafer. "My phones are ringing off the hook."

In the Digital Human Project at the University of Colorado, children and adults can see and understand disease progression through the use of simulations. Healthcare via telemedia will prove important in many of the same ways that face-to-face healthcare is important. Doctors will serve special populations. And media channels such as Discovery Health will proliferate.

Web-enabled devices already serve us in extreme emergency situations with real-time communication. They will also help us better understand cholesterol, obesity, cancer, arthritis,

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and other ailments and conditions.

In a Georgia Medical College experiment, physicians monitored patients during "house calls" by linking computers with cameras at the hospital to computers with cameras in patients' homes. Maui Community College in Hawaii is monitoring patients at home via inexpensive web-cameras mounted on patients' TVs.

The future is neither simple nor inexpensive. World telehealth requires leaders with sophistication who understand psychology and the human experience, as well as technology. Their mastery of communication will be of paramount importance ■



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