

Research Digest: Health Promotion

Bischoff, R. J. (2004). Considerations in the use of telecommunications as a primary treatment medium: The application of behavioral telehealth to marriage and family therapy. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 32, 173-187.

This article identified six issues that should be considered before deciding to use behavioral telehealth. These issues are convenience, financial cost, quality of the transmission, client anonymity, the degree to which the therapist has access to the full range of information needed to conduct therapy, and ethical and legal issues. Further discussions of several of the issues are presented below.

One of the primary advantages of telecommunications is convenience. Clients may find treatment delivered through telecommunications means fewer disruptions of their schedules, allowing them more time at home, at work, or in other activities. For therapists, it can possibly result in greater flexibility in schedule, decreased (or eliminated) travel times, and fewer cancellations. The level of client anonymity assured through telecommunications, particularly through the Internet, may appeal to the subgroup of people who may not otherwise access mental health services.

Seven common telecommunications options are reviewed with a discussion of their advantages and disadvantages. These include: telephone, electronic mail, Internet-aided synchronous written discussions, Internet-aided synchronous audio-only discussions, Internet-based video/ audio discussions, videophone, and non-Internet based live video conferencing. While services have been offered using each of these strategies individually, it is also possible to offer services using a combination of strategies.

This Research Digest is a product of the Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools. The research presented is a sample of state-of-the-art research conducted in the area of health promotion by faculty at UNL. For more information on the Center, please contact Holly Sexton at hsexton1@unl.edu