Is FaceTime a Viable Alternative to Onsite Clinical Site Evaluations?

With graduate nursing programs converting to online formatting, students can be located all over the country. However, it becomes challenging to monitor these students during their clinical rotations. Most universities require two faculty site visits during a semester. The author has encountered a variety of requirements for faculty site visits, which include one or two per semester, depending on the number of required clinical hours. During these site visits, faculty talk with preceptors about their students, evaluate students’ progress, and evaluate the clinical sites to make sure they are appropriate.

Due to tightening university budgets and the financial needs of students, it is difficult for faculty to evaluate these distance-learning students, while maintaining requirements set by the National Task Force on Quality Nurse Practitioner Education (NTF, 2012). One way for programs to meet NTF requirements is to provide documentation, using technology-supported site visits by faculty (NTF, 2012). The use of technology-supported visits reduces travel expenses, as well as the time faculty spends driving to and from distant clinical sites.

During employment at local universities, the author initiated methods of evaluating distance learning students. One method is the hiring of faculty from distant locations, for which the students are responsible for finding and paying. The students must find a preceptor for their clinical hours, along with a nurse practitioner as their clinical faculty. Some programs pay for faculty to travel, which increases expense to the school or the student. Instead, FaceTime® was used as another method of graduate clinical site evaluations for an adult nurse practitioner program. Each student was provided with an iPad® to use for the semester, which was paid for by a grant that was obtained by the author.

Apple® security and university information technology department security, along with a Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) compliance officer, were contacted by the author prior to using FaceTime to ensure HIPAA compliance. Because FaceTime is encrypted, no one else can view the interaction between the individuals using it (Apple, Inc., n.d.) Both parties must use an Apple product, such as an iPad or iPhone®. The student and faculty using FaceTime must follow HIPAA guidelines by using FaceTime only when both parties are in private locations, which is not different than providing privacy during any patient interaction in an office setting.

Most students were already familiar with FaceTime; therefore, little instruction was needed. For those students who had never used FaceTime, instructions were provided, and connection was achieved before scheduling a site visit to lessen student anxiety. All students checked their clinical sites for Internet connection prior to using FaceTime. All site locations were equipped with wireless Internet. After scheduling a date and approximate time for the FaceTime site visit, the student texted the faculty member when the patient was ready. Verbal patient consent was obtained prior to connecting to FaceTime. The student and faculty then connected, a brief history was given to the faculty member, and then the student set the iPad in the room. The instructor was able to view the entire interaction between the student and the patient, speak with the preceptor, and view any documentation while connected on FaceTime, without the time or expense of travel. Only two times during nine site visits was the Internet connection lost, and reconnection had to take place.

The author, who was the clinical faculty, saved more than 30 hours of travel time, as well as saving the university travel expenses. FaceTime was easy to use and was secure and cost efficient. The author plans to gather perceptions of using the FaceTime technology from students and preceptors to evaluate its efficacy. Since this method of performing site visits was initiated, other faculty have expressed interest in using FaceTime in other clinical settings.

References

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