



Content Outline

TeleMental Health Examination (TMHE)

Examination Purpose and Measurement Focus

The TeleMental Health Examination (TMHE) measures a professional's ability to apply and evaluate knowledge in core telemental health (TMH) best practices. The TMHE is designed for National Certified Counselors (NCCs) or licensed mental and behavioral health professionals, including professionals under supervised practice. The qualifying criteria to take the TMHE are stated in the minimally qualified candidate profile.

The TMHE provides a standardized measure of the Center for Credentialing & Education (CCE) core competencies associated with providing TMH services. The examination was developed after a comprehensive job analysis survey conducted in the spring of 2023 and led to the identification of six core domains of TMH services, including:

1. Orientation to Telemental Health
2. Practitioner Protocols and Informed Consent
3. Implementation of Telemental Health
4. Professional, Legal, and Compliance Standards
5. Professional Ethics
6. Crisis Management

Target Population and the Minimally Qualified Candidate

The minimally qualified candidate (MQC) for the TMHE has a master's degree or higher in a mental health or behavioral health field. The MQC should hold a qualifying mental health or behavioral health professional license issued by a state regulatory board, and/or hold the NCC. A qualifying professional may be currently working as an associate/intern or under supervised practice if the professional complies with practice limitations.

Examination Form

The TMHE is composed of 12 case studies comprised of 10 multiple-choice questions each. The case studies present hypothetical clients that are receiving TMH services and other scenarios involving the implementation of TMH. Each case study assesses a candidate's ability to provide care in a safe and effective way. Of the 120 examination items on the TMHE, 20 are unscored items and 100 items are scored. Both scored and unscored items are of the same structure, and they appear in a randomized order throughout the examination. Examinees will have 3 hours to complete the TMHE.

Development of the Content Outline

The TMHE was developed through a national job analysis survey, which was completed by 848 TMH practitioners. The survey was designed to assess the skills and knowledge areas that are required for safe and effective TMH services. The job analysis survey results were evaluated by a committee of subject matter experts (SMEs) who were actively practicing TMH practitioners. Working collaboratively, they identified the aspects of mental health and behavioral health services that were most impacted when practitioners are geographically separate from clients or when services to clients are provided asynchronously. The resultant content outline was created and approved by the TMHE Subject Matter Expert (SME) Committee in April 2023. The committee's responsibilities included, but were not limited to, defining the TMHE; defining the MQC for the TMHE; determining the examination format, length, and blueprint; and finalizing the content outline.

Table 1 presents the six domains and the percent of scored items on the TMHE for each domain.

Table 1

	Domain	Percent of Scored Items
1	Orientation to Telemental Health	10
2	Practitioner Protocols and Informed Consent	20
3	Implementation of Telemental Health	25
4	Professional, Legal, and Compliance Standards	20
5	Professional Ethics	13
6	Crisis Management	12

The following core domains and associated skills and knowledge areas were identified by SMEs with experience in providing TMH services. These domains are supported by the TMH literature and existing education in TMH services

Table 2. *Skills and knowledge areas related to the domains*

Domain 1. Orientation to Telemental Health

- A. Differentiate between TMH and non-TMH practice
- B. Distinguish between various technological modalities
- C. Evaluate and select technologies for TMH
- D. Explain the benefits and risks of different TMH modalities
- E. Explain the public health need for TMH
- F. Identify the different settings for TMH practice
- G. Know security aspects of different technologies
- H. Know terminology relevant to TMH
- I. Know the terms related to technology
- J. Know the TMH requirements toward ongoing training, knowledge, and supervision
- K. Know hardware, software, and internet connection needs
- L. Understand contraindications for TMH
- M. Understand the history of TMH
- N. Understand the need for various options for local area supports

Domain 2. Practitioner Protocols and Informed Consent

- A. Clarify expectations for TMH sessions
- B. Facilitate the TMH disclosure and informed consent process in an ethical manner
- C. Establish a policy for social media
- D. Establish protocol to clarify bounds and requirements of the practitioner when client is in crisis
- E. Explain benefits and risks of different TMH modalities

- F. Explain challenges and risks of TMH (e.g., technology failure, confidentiality, private connection)
- G. Prepare a protocol for management of technical difficulties
- H. Establish and adhere to verification protocols for safety and privacy
- I. Establish and adhere to verification protocols for identity and location
- J. Prepare a protocol for establishing local resources and an emergency contact

Domain 3. Implementation of Telemental Health

- A. Address concerns of clients related to TMH
- B. Apply required technology security protocols
- C. Apply setting-specific security needs
- D. Conduct ongoing assessment of the client's personal resources and abilities
- E. Consider risk factors (e.g., domestic violence, suicidality, homicidality, systemic challenges)
- F. Demonstrate to the client how to access technology of choice
- G. Determine client resources and abilities in relation to TMH
- H. Develop rapport with clients across TMH modalities
- I. Establish client identity in a virtual environment
- J. Establish client safety prior to session
- K. Evaluate ongoing effectiveness of TMH
- L. Familiarize self with client local, state, and national community resources
- M. Implement screening for suitability to engage in TMH
- N. Model practitioner TMH etiquette within different modalities
- O. Obtain and maintain adequate documentation
- P. Perform ongoing client risk assessments
- Q. Troubleshoot technical difficulties and poor quality of communication
- R. Monitor ongoing informed consent

Domain 4. Professional, Legal, and Compliance Standards

- A. Adhere to the Client's Bill of Rights
- B. Conduct technology risk assessment
- C. Demonstrate appropriate response to data loss
- D. Demonstrate appropriate response to security breaches
- E. Understand and maintain HITECH compliance
- F. Explain Protected Health Information (PHI)
- G. Follow rules and regulations related to storing and destroying session recordings and documentation
- H. Follow rules and regulations related to recording sessions
- I. Follow state and federal laws directing TMH practice
- J. Know order of authority between state-level and federal regulations
- K. Know risks of security breaches
- L. Know the consequences of noncompliance
- M. Know the importance of business associate agreements
- N. Know the types of safeguards (technological, administrative, and physical) for risks and threats
- O. Know what constitutes a breach
- P. Know who can and cannot access PHI and when
- Q. Understand and maintain HIPAA (covered entities, privacy rule, security rule, privacy officer)

Domain 5. Professional Ethics

- A. Consider the risks to diverse populations of using various emergency management systems
- B. Understand and apply best practices in TMH
- C. Utilize resources available to troubleshoot TMH issues
- D. Document ethically

- E. Follow ethical guidelines related to screening and intake
- F. Follow ethical guidelines with social media
- G. Maintain confidentiality with respect to TMH modality
- H. Follow ethical guidelines pertaining to practitioner values and biases
- I. Operate within your scope of practice
- J. Sustain ethical clinician relationships/boundaries
- K. Use technology ethically

Domain 6. Crisis Management

- A. Apply best practices in culturally appropriate crisis intervention
- B. Assess if client is in crisis
- C. Create an emergency management plan
- D. Employ de-escalation strategies in crisis
- E. Identify the signs of a crisis
- F. Initiate involuntary commitment process
- G. Maintain elements of a safety plan
- H. Manage a list of active client-local emergency resources
- I. Follow a protocol for establishing local resources and an emergency contact
- J. Determine additional risk factors involved related to diverse populations when utilizing various emergency management systems

Sample TMHE Narrative

Your client, a 32-year-old Black cisgender woman, has asked to see you via telemental health services and states that she is only able to attend sessions during her lunch hour. Your client completed your online paperwork, and you verify those answers during the initial intake session after reviewing the informed consent process. You also confirm her address and verify her location and her identity in accordance with the telemental health section of your professional disclosure statement. You ask her to provide you with the contact information of two support persons who you can contact in the event of an emergency. Your client responds, “I can give you my husband’s phone number, but that’s probably it. The rest of my family lives across the country, so they wouldn’t be much help if something happened.”

Your client discloses that she recently learned that she is pregnant. She states, “I just took the pregnancy test last week and, ever since, I haven’t been able to sleep, and I am anxious all the time. I wasn’t able to get an appointment with my OB/GYN for another 3 weeks, and I just don’t know if I can wait that long to find out if everything is okay with the baby.” You also learn that your client has suffered two pregnancy losses in the past 18 months. She and her husband have been struggling with communication problems recently because she only seems to be able to “panic about this pregnancy or cry nonstop because of the babies I’ve lost.”

The client is in her office at work, and the session is interrupted twice by different coworkers who needed to “ask a quick question.” Your client is polite each time and asks them to come back later, but she needs to regroup after each interruption and repeats different parts of her story several times. She informs you that, although her office is private, the lock on the door is broken.

You ask your client to describe what she means by “anxious all the time,” and she begins to describe experiencing an elevated heartbeat, increased breathing, and sweaty palms and armpits. She also reports that she started biting her nails again, even though she thought she eliminated the habit in high school. She states that, “I am just so nervous all the time that I am going to lose this baby. I lie awake at night thinking about the baby’s safety, and if I happen to fall asleep, it doesn’t last long because I have nightmares about waking up in a pool of blood.”

You confirm that your client has no suicidal or homicidal ideation. You also confirm that she accurately reported that she does not use any substances or drink alcohol. She states, “I would never put anything in my body that might hurt my baby.” Your client also informs you that, while she and her husband are happy together, he is noticeably “frustrated with the fact that I don’t sleep and panic and cry all the time.” She also tells you that she struggles with the fact that he doesn’t seem as sad as she thinks he should be about the babies that they have lost. She says, “I probably resent him for that, but who knows? I mean, you’re the expert, right?”

Sample Questions

Domain 1.

Which client characteristic reflects the general need for telemental health services?

- A. the client's level of anxiety
- B. the client's lack of access to her OB/GYN
- C. the client's grief experiences
- D. the client's schedule**

Domain 2.

How would you verify your client's identity?

- A. Call the client's husband after obtaining a release of information.
- B. Request a copy of the client's Social Security number.
- C. Instruct the client to display a government-issued photo ID to the camera.**
- D. Ask the client to confirm her date of birth to see if it matches the intake form.

Domain 2.

How would you address the interruptions to the intake session?

- A. Plan to broach the topic at the start of the following session.
- B. Ask to reschedule the intake session to another time.
- C. Require that future sessions be put on pause until the door lock is fixed.
- D. Discuss a plan to eliminate interruptions to promote privacy.**

Domain 4.

The client requests a couples session, and her husband prefers to attend the session from his work location. You decide to look into a platform that features group video conferencing. What is important to consider?

- A. if the platform facilitates audio calls
- B. if the platform has an instant messaging feature
- C. if the platform will enter into a business associate agreement**
- D. if the platform requires electronic private health information of the clients

Domain 5.

What would you discuss with your client regarding your social media policy?

- A. You will follow your client's social media through your professional account.
- B. Connecting with your client from your personal social media account is prohibited.**
- C. Your client should message your professional account for scheduling purposes.
- D. Engaging with your professional account is to be avoided.

Domain 2.

How should you prepare your client for potential connectivity issues?

- A. Instruct the client to call your designated phone number.**
- B. Instruct the client to send you an email to explain the problem.
- C. Inform the client you will reach out to her husband in case there is a safety issue.
- D. Inform the client that you will report the issue to the video platform's customer service.