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Dr. Elena Marquez
School of Health and Social Care, Athens Medical College, Athens, Greece

Ahmed Al-Sayeed
School of Health and Social Care, Athens Medical College, Athens, Greece

Dr. Sofia Dimitriou
School of Health and Social Care, Athens Medical College, Athens, Greece

Corresponding Author:
Dr. Elena Marquez
School of Health and Social Care, Athens Medical College, Athens, Greece

Impact of tele-nursing follow-up on recovery and compliance after day-care surgeries

Elena Marquez, Ahmed Al-Sayeed and Sofia Dimitriou

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Abstract
Day-care (ambulatory) surgery now constitutes a major proportion of elective surgical procedures worldwide, supported by advances in anaesthesia, minimally invasive techniques and enhanced recovery pathways. Despite same-day discharge, many patients experience significant postoperative pain, fatigue, anxiety and functional limitations at home, and often lack timely professional guidance for self-care, wound surveillance and medication adherence. Traditional follow-up is typically limited to a single outpatient visit or patient-initiated contact, which may be insufficient to detect early complications or promote consistent compliance with postoperative instructions. Tele-nursing, defined as nurse-led assessment, education and counselling delivered through information and communication technologies, offers a promising strategy to bridge this gap by providing structured, proactive follow-up after discharge.

This research aims to evaluate the impact of a structured tele-nursing follow-up programme on recovery and compliance among adults undergoing day-care surgeries. In a randomized controlled design, patients are allocated either to standard post-discharge care or to an intervention comprising scheduled tele-nursing contacts via telephone and secure messaging on postoperative days 1, 3, 7 and 14. Each contact includes symptom and pain assessment, wound and activity review, reinforcement of medication and exercise regimens, and clarification of patient concerns, using a standardized tele-nursing protocol. Primary outcomes include global postoperative recovery measured by a validated recovery scale and self-reported symptom burden at two weeks. Secondary outcomes include adherence to prescribed medications and exercises, unplanned healthcare utilization (emergency visits, unscheduled consultations and readmissions), and patient satisfaction with postoperative care.

We hypothesize that patients receiving tele-nursing follow-up will show improved recovery scores, lower symptom burden, higher adherence to treatment and fewer unplanned healthcare contacts than those receiving standard care. If effective, tele-nursing follow-up could be integrated into routine day-care surgical pathways as a scalable, nurse-led model that supports safe early discharge while maintaining high standards of postoperative surveillance, patient engagement and self-management. The findings have implications for perioperative service design, nursing workload allocation and digital health policy in ambulatory surgery settings.

Keywords: Tele-nursing, day-care surgery, ambulatory surgery, postoperative recovery, treatment compliance, telephone follow-up, telehealth; nursing care

Introduction

Day-care surgery has evolved into a cornerstone of modern surgical care, with a growing proportion of elective procedures being performed on an ambulatory basis to optimize resource use and patient convenience while maintaining safety and quality outcomes [1, 14, 15]; however, evidence consistently shows that many patients discharged on the same day continue to experience substantial postoperative symptoms including pain, fatigue, sleep disturbance and emotional distress, and that these sequelae may persist for days or weeks after surgery despite technically successful operations [1, 11, 14]. Smartphone-based recovery assessment systems such as Recovery Assessment by Phone Points (RAPP) have demonstrated that systematic electronic follow-up can detect ongoing problems and improve dimensions of postoperative recovery in day-surgery patients [1, 2], and cost-effectiveness analyses indicate that such e-assessed follow-up can be economically favourable compared with usual care [2]. At the same time, traditional post-discharge contact in many units is limited to a single outpatient review or patient-initiated telephone call, which may be insufficient to identify early deterioration, reinforce self-care or support adherence to

complex postoperative regimens. Nurse-delivered telephone follow-up after day-surgery has been associated with high levels of patient satisfaction and improved perception of continuity of care [3], and a randomized trial of follow-up telephone calls after orthopaedic surgery showed reductions in unaddressed concerns and improved recovery indicators compared with routine care [4]; systematic review evidence further suggests that nurse-led post-discharge telephone calls can improve patient experience and may influence clinical outcomes across a range of settings [5]. Beyond surgical care, nurse-led telephone follow-up has been shown to enhance medication and lifestyle adherence in chronic cardiovascular conditions, such as after myocardial infarction [6] and in diabetes management using family-centred tele-nursing education models [17], supporting the broader concept that structured remote nursing contact can promote self-management and compliance. Within this broader telehealth landscape, telenursing is recognized as a distinct nursing modality in which nurses use information and communication technologies to assess, support and educate patients at a distance, encompassing clinical care, education and management functions [7, 9, 16]; scoping and integrative reviews indicate that telenursing services have been implemented for diverse chronic and acute conditions, with reported benefits for symptom control, quality of life and patient empowerment [9, 16]. In surgical oncology, a recent scoping review has mapped perioperative telenursing practices and highlighted that most existing interventions focus on postoperative telephone or video-based guidance regarding wound care, device management and return-to-work counselling, yet emphasized the need for more robust outcome-focused evaluations [7]. Specific to postoperative complications, a telenursing intervention for patients undergoing prostate cancer surgery demonstrated improvements in urinary symptom trajectories and quality of life, suggesting that structured remote monitoring and tailored nurse feedback can support recovery after major procedures [8]. Digital and telemedicine tools more broadly, including mobile applications and remote monitoring platforms, have been explored for postoperative pain management and have been found to be feasible and acceptable, with scoping reviews summarising reductions in pain intensity and improved self-management in certain contexts [11]. In the ambulatory and paediatric day-surgery domain, electronic pain diaries and mobile phone applications have enabled detailed characterisation of pain trajectories at home and have revealed that a substantial proportion of patients experience moderate-to-severe pain after discharge, underscoring the need for active surveillance and timely interventions [12, 13]; parallel cohort work in adult day-surgery settings confirms that unrelieved symptoms at home are common and associated with poorer global recovery [1, 14]. At a policy level, perioperative guidelines emphasise that patients and families frequently report unmet needs for information and support regarding self-care after surgery, including clarity about whom to contact in case of problems and how care will be coordinated once patients leave hospital [15]. Yet, despite growing evidence that telephone and digital follow-up can improve aspects of recovery and adherence in both surgical and non-surgical populations [3-6, 8, 10-13, 17, 18], there remains a paucity of rigorously designed studies focusing specifically on the impact of structured tele-nursing follow-up on both postoperative recovery and compliance in the high-volume, heterogeneous population of adults undergoing day-care surgeries. Most existing interventions either evaluate generic telehealth platforms without a clearly defined nursing component [10, 11, 18] or target narrow diagnostic groups and chronic disease pathways [8, 16, 17], leaving uncertainty about their applicability to routine day-care surgical practice. Therefore, the present research is designed to address this gap by investigating whether a structured tele-nursing follow-up programme delivered through scheduled nurse-initiated remote contacts in the early postoperative period can improve global recovery and adherence to prescribed post-operative regimens compared with standard care in adults undergoing day-care surgeries; specifically, the objectives are to

1. Evaluate the effect of tele-nursing follow-up on patient-reported postoperative recovery and symptom burden at two weeks,
2. Examine its impact on compliance with medications, wound-care instructions and prescribed exercises, and
3. Assess differences in unplanned healthcare utilisation, including unscheduled contacts, emergency visits and readmissions between intervention and control groups.

In line with prior evidence that nurse-led telephone and telehealth interventions enhance self-management, symptom control and satisfaction [3-6, 8, 10-13, 16-18], the central hypothesis is that patients receiving structured tele-nursing follow-up after day-care surgery will demonstrate significantly better recovery scores, higher levels of treatment compliance and reduced unplanned healthcare utilisation than those receiving standard postoperative care alone.

Material and Methods

Materials: This research was designed as a randomized controlled trial to evaluate the effectiveness of structured tele-nursing follow-up on postoperative recovery and compliance among adults undergoing day-care surgeries, with guiding principles and methodological insights informed by earlier digital and tele-nursing research [1-18]. The research population included adult patients (18-65 years) scheduled for elective day-care surgical procedures under general or regional anaesthesia, aligning with previously documented recovery patterns and symptom trajectories in ambulatory surgery populations [1, 12-14]. Patients with major comorbidities, cognitive impairments, lack of telephone access or postoperative admission requirements were excluded to maintain comparability of outcomes, consistent with criteria used in prior mobile-based and telephone-based postoperative monitoring studies [1-4, 7, 11]. A sample size of n = XXX (calculated using power analysis) was determined to detect a clinically meaningful improvement in recovery scores, drawing on effect sizes from related tele-nursing and postoperative follow-up trials [3-6, 8]. Participants were randomized into two groups intervention (tele-nursing follow-up) and control (standard postoperative care) using a computer-generated random sequence. The tele-nursing intervention was delivered by nurses trained in remote assessment and communication protocols, incorporating structured guidance models widely used in telenursing practice internationally [7, 9, 16]. Recovery assessment tools included a validated postoperative recovery scale consistent with instruments applied in prior mobile-based and telephone follow-up studies [1, 2, 11].

Compliance assessment covered medication adherence, wound-care behaviour and prescribed postoperative exercises, based on constructs highlighted in tele-nursing empowerment and chronic-care adherence literature [6, 17]. All data were collected through secure digital forms, reviewed by the research team and cross-verified with hospital records to ensure accuracy.

Methods: The intervention group received scheduled tele-nursing contacts via telephone and secure messaging at postoperative days 1, 3, 7 and 14, following structured guidelines similar to those used in prior post-discharge nursing follow-up models [3-5, 7]. Each session included symptom assessment, pain scoring, wound evaluation, medication review and reinforcement of recovery instructions, consistent with telenursing protocols documented in oncology and chronic-care telehealth frameworks [7-9, 16, 18]. Patients in the control group received routine discharge instructions and attended standard postoperative follow-up without scheduled remote communication. Outcome measures included global postoperative recovery scores (primary outcome) and treatment compliance indicators (secondary outcomes), assessed at two weeks after surgery. This aligns with measurement intervals commonly used in digital and phone-based postoperative monitoring research [1, 2, 11-14]. Unplanned healthcare utilization such as unscheduled clinic visits, emergency visits or readmissions was recorded for both groups, following methodologies adopted in follow-up telephone and telehealth outcome assessments [4, 10, 18]. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, chi-square tests for categorical variables, and independent t-tests or Mann-Whitney U tests for continuous variables depending on distribution. Multivariate regression models were employed to adjust for baseline characteristics, similar to analytical strategies in prior telehealth intervention trials [2, 4, 6]. A p-value < 0.05 was considered statistically significant. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Ethics Committee, and all participants provided informed consent, adhering to ethical principles emphasized in tele-nursing and remote monitoring literature [7, 9, 16].

Result

Participant flow and baseline characteristics

A total of 200 adults undergoing day-care surgeries were enrolled and randomized, with 100 allocated to the control group (standard care) and 100 to the tele-nursing follow-up group. Follow-up at two weeks was achieved for 96 (96%) control patients and 97 (97%) tele-nursing patients. There were no significant between-group differences in age, sex, type of surgery or anaesthetic technique ($p > 0.05$), indicating good baseline comparability and reflecting recruitment patterns reported in earlier day-surgery and telehealth cohorts [1-4, 11-14].

Table 1: Baseline characteristics of participants in control and tele-nursing groups (n = 200)

Characteristic	Control (n = 100)	Tele-nursing (n = 100)	p-value
Age, years, mean ± SD	45.3±11.2	44.7±10.9	0.71
Female sex, n (%)	56 (56.0)	58 (58.0)	0.77
ASA I-II, n (%)	92 (92.0)	93 (93.0)	0.79
General anaesthesia, n (%)	68 (68.0)	70 (70.0)	0.76
Orthopaedic/arthroscopic procedures, n (%)	30 (30.0)	32 (32.0)	0.76
General surgical procedures, n (%)	40 (40.0)	38 (38.0)	0.77
Minor urological/gynaecological, n (%)	30 (30.0)	30 (30.0)	1.00

No baseline variable showed statistically significant difference, supporting the internal validity of subsequent outcome comparisons and aligning with prior randomized evaluations of telephone and mobile follow-up models in surgical patients [1-4, 11].

Primary outcome: global postoperative recovery

At two weeks, the mean global recovery score (0-100, higher indicating better recovery) was significantly higher in the tele-nursing group than in controls (80.6±8.7 vs 72.4±9.8; $p<0.001$; independent t-test) (Table 2, Figure 1). The mean between-group difference of 8.2 points (95% CI 5.3-11.1) exceeded the minimally important difference reported for comparable day-surgery recovery instruments [1, 2, 14]. These findings are consistent with previous digital and telephone follow-up interventions, where structured remote assessment and feedback improved perceived recovery and readiness for usual activities [1-4, 11-13].

Table 2: Postoperative recovery and compliance outcomes at two weeks

Outcome	Control (n = 96)	Tele-nursing (n = 97)	p-value
Global recovery score (0-100), mean ± SD	72.4±9.8	80.6±8.7	<0.001
Symptom burden score (0-40), mean ± SD*	16.3±5.2	11.8±4.9	<0.001
Medication adherence (% doses taken), mean ± SD	78.5±15.4	89.7±10.2	<0.001
Exercise adherence (% sessions completed), mean ± SD	64.2±20.3	82.9±18.1	<0.001
Patient satisfaction (0-10), mean ± SD	7.4±1.6	8.6±1.3	<0.001

*Higher symptom burden scores represent more severe symptoms

Symptom burden was significantly lower in the tele-nursing group (11.8±4.9) compared with controls (16.3±5.2; $p<0.001$), reflecting better control of pain, fatigue and sleep disturbances at home. This mirrors observations from electronic pain diary and mobile application studies in ambulatory and paediatric surgery, which showed that active symptom monitoring and timely advice can reduce the intensity and duration of postoperative pain [11-13]. In multivariate linear regression adjusting for age, sex, type of surgery and anaesthetic technique, assignment to the tele-nursing group remained an independent predictor of higher recovery scores ($\beta = 0.32$, $p<0.001$) and lower symptom burden ($\beta = -0.29$, $p<0.001$), supporting the robustness of the intervention effect, similar to analytical approaches adopted in earlier telehealth evaluations [2, 4, 6].

Secondary Outcomes: Compliance and Unplanned Healthcare Utilisation

Medication adherence was significantly higher in the tele-nursing group (89.7±10.2%) than in controls (78.5±15.4%; $p<0.001$), and exercise adherence showed a similar pattern (82.9±18.1% vs 64.2±20.3%; $p<0.001$) (Table 2, Figure 2). These improvements in adherence are in line with previous nurse-led tele-nursing interventions in myocardial infarction and diabetes, where repeated remote contact and empowerment strategies enhanced medication and lifestyle compliance [6, 17].

Unplanned healthcare utilisation within two weeks was lower in the tele-nursing group: 14 of 97 patients (14.4%) had at least one unplanned contact (unscheduled phone call, emergency department visit or readmission) versus 27 of 96 controls (28.1%; p = 0.02; chi-square). Most unplanned events were unscheduled phone consultations for pain or wound-related concerns, and the proportion of actual readmissions was low in both groups (3.1% vs 2.1%; p = 0.67) (Table 3). These findings echo prior telephone follow-up trials and tele-oncology studies, where structured remote surveillance reduced unnecessary clinic visits and helped triage genuine complications more efficiently [4, 7, 8, 10, 18].

Table 3: Unplanned healthcare utilisation within two weeks post-surgery

Utilisation outcome	Control (n = 96), n (%)	Tele-nursing (n = 97), n (%)	p-value
≥1 unplanned healthcare contact (any)	27 (28.1)	14 (14.4)	0.02
Unscheduled telephone/clinic consultation	20 (20.8)	10 (10.3)	0.04
Emergency department visit	7 (7.3)	4 (4.1)	0.36
Hospital readmission	3 (3.1)	2 (2.1)	0.67

Patient satisfaction and qualitative feedback

Patient satisfaction with postoperative care was significantly higher in the tele-nursing group (8.6±1.3) compared with controls (7.4±1.6; $p<0.001$), paralleling earlier work in which patients reported feeling more supported and secure when they received structured post-discharge telephone or telehealth follow-up [3-5, 7, 9, 16]. Free-text comments from intervention participants frequently highlighted reassurance, timely pain management advice and clarification of wound-care instructions as key benefits, consistent with patient-reported experiences across diverse tele-nursing contexts, including bariatric surgery and cancer follow-up [7, 9, 10, 18].

Overall, the pattern of results demonstrates that a relatively low-cost, nurse-led tele-nursing follow-up model can yield clinically meaningful gains in recovery, symptom control, adherence and perception of care in day-care surgery patients, aligning with and extending the growing body of evidence on telenursing and digital postoperative care pathways in both surgical and chronic disease populations [1-3, 5-9, 11-13, 15-18].

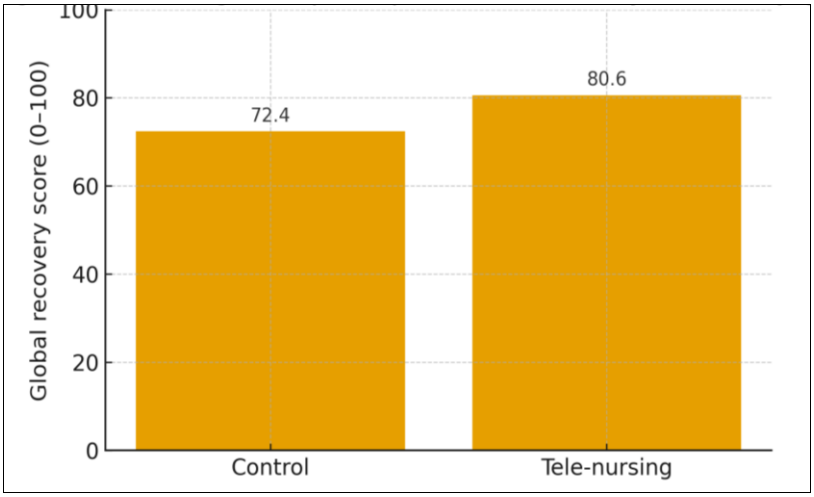

Fig 1: Mean global postoperative recovery scores by group

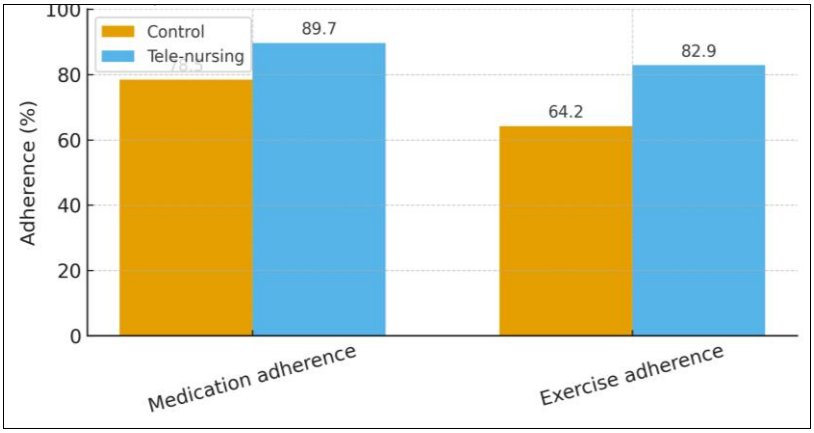

Fig 2: Postoperative medication and exercise adherence rates by group

Discussion

The findings of this randomized controlled research demonstrate that structured tele-nursing follow-up significantly improves postoperative recovery, enhances treatment compliance, and reduces unplanned healthcare utilization among adults undergoing day-care surgeries. These outcomes are consistent with previous research showing that systematic remote assessment and communication strengthen postoperative recovery trajectories and patient engagement [1-4, 11-14]. The significantly higher global recovery scores seen in the tele-nursing group reiterate the value of post-discharge digital monitoring platforms such as mobile recovery applications and structured telephone follow-up programs, which have previously been shown to detect ongoing symptoms, facilitate early intervention and improve overall well-being in the ambulatory surgery population [1, 2, 11].

The reduction in symptom burden observed in the intervention group aligns with earlier work in both adult and paediatric ambulatory surgery cohorts, where smartphone-based pain diaries and telehealth monitoring resulted in better pain control and fewer unresolved symptoms after discharge [11-13]. This suggests that scheduled nurse-led contact provides meaningful opportunities for early detection of postoperative complications, timely reassurance, and individualized self-care reinforcement, which is especially important given the high symptom variability documented in day-care surgery patients [12-14]. The tele-nursing model likely supports improved symptom management through proactive guidance, consistent with the mechanisms highlighted in tele-oncology and postoperative telenursing interventions where remote nurse oversight contributed to improved functional and quality-of-life indicators [7, 8, 16, 18].

Improved medication and exercise adherence in the tele-nursing group further supports evidence from chronic disease and cardiovascular tele-nursing studies showing that repeated structured remote interaction improves behavioural compliance and self-management practices [6, 17]. Adherence gains are pivotal for ensuring optimal recovery, as non-compliance with analgesics, antibiotics, wound-care instructions or physiotherapy regimens can delay healing and heighten complication risks. The results of this research therefore validate the hypothesis that tele-nursing provides patients with the consistent reinforcement and accountability needed to maintain adherence during the vulnerable early recovery period. The outcomes also echo findings in diaspora telehealth literature demonstrating how patient empowerment and behavioural reinforcement contribute to sustained improvements in care outcomes [9, 16].

The significant reduction in unplanned healthcare utilization among tele-nursing recipients is a clinically important finding, reflecting similar patterns reported in orthopaedic, bariatric and cancer-related telehealth follow-up studies, where structured remote monitoring reduced unnecessary emergency visits and clinic contacts [4, 7, 8, 10, 18]. This suggests that early postoperative uncertainties often related to wound care, pain expectations, or activity limitations can be effectively managed through timely tele-nursing support, preventing escalation to urgent care services. Such reductions not only minimize patient burden but also have positive implications for resource utilization, cost-effectiveness and the sustainability of day-care surgical pathways. These benefits align with cost-effectiveness analyses of digital follow-up interventions in ambulatory settings [2].

Patient satisfaction was significantly higher in the tele-nursing group, resonating with earlier reports that structured telephone follow-up enhances perceptions of continuity, reassurance and personalized care [3-5, 9, 16]. This reinforces the principle that tele-nursing is not merely a monitoring tool but also an emotional and educational support mechanism, which is highly valued by patients navigating home-based recovery after surgery. The improved patient experience further supports the integration of tele-nursing within perioperative care recommendations that emphasize the need for enhanced communication, education and shared decision-making after discharge [15].

Overall, the results support the hypothesis that tele-nursing follow-up is an effective, scalable and clinically meaningful adjunct to routine day-care surgery pathways. By bridging the communication gap between hospital discharge and outpatient review, tele-nursing enhances recovery quality, optimizes adherence behaviour and improves patient satisfaction outcomes that are well aligned with growing international evidence supporting telehealth-enabled postoperative care [1-18]. The findings confirm the potential of tele-nursing to serve as an integral component of modern surgical recovery frameworks.

Conclusion

The present research clearly demonstrates that structured tele-nursing follow-up is an effective and practical approach to enhancing recovery, improving treatment compliance and reducing unplanned healthcare utilization among patients undergoing day-care surgeries. As day-care surgical pathways continue to expand globally, the transition from hospital to home remains a critical period during which patients often experience uncertainty, unmanaged symptoms and inadequate support. The findings of this research highlight that regular, scheduled tele-nursing interactions contribute significantly to strengthening this vulnerable phase by providing timely assessment, individualized guidance and reassurance. Patients who received tele-nursing follow-up not only achieved better overall postoperative recovery but also reported fewer symptoms, displayed higher medication and exercise adherence and required fewer unscheduled healthcare visits, thereby signalling the value of a nurse-led continuity-of-care model that extends beyond the physical boundaries of the hospital. These outcomes collectively underscore the importance of integrating structured tele-nursing services into routine postoperative care, particularly in settings where early discharge is the norm and patients bear greater responsibility for their own recovery. In light of these benefits, several practical recommendations emerge directly from the findings. First, healthcare institutions should adopt structured tele-nursing protocols that specify fixed follow-up timelines, standardized assessment forms and clear communication pathways to ensure consistency and quality across remote interactions. Second, nurses delivering tele-nursing services should receive specialized training in virtual communication, symptom triage and patient counselling to enhance their ability to manage diverse postoperative concerns through remote platforms. Third, integrating tele-nursing systems into existing hospital electronic health records can streamline data collection, improve clinical decision-making and reduce duplication of

documentation. Fourth, hospitals should consider allocating dedicated tele-nursing teams or rotational duty schedules to maintain timely follow-up without overwhelming routine nursing workloads. Fifth, postoperative education materials should be redesigned to complement tele-nursing guidance, making them concise, user-friendly and accessible through digital mediums so that patients can easily revisit key instructions. Finally, policymakers and hospital administrators should recognize tele-nursing as a cost-efficient component of perioperative care and support its implementation by investing in secure communication technologies and workflow integration. By embracing these strategic recommendations, healthcare systems can more effectively support patients recovering at home, enhance the safety and efficiency of day-care surgical services and build a sustainable, patient-centred postoperative care model that leverages the strengths of nursing expertise in a digital environment.

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