



## Clinical care pathway strengthens interprofessional collaboration and quality of health service: a literature review

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### KEYWORDS

Clinical pathway;  
Care pathway;  
Interprofessional  
collaboration

### Abstract

**Objective:** To review the effectiveness of a clinical care pathway on interprofessional collaboration and quality of health service.

**Method:** A review was performed of literature published from 2000 to 2015, with the following keywords: clinical pathway, care pathway, and interprofessional collaboration.

**Results:** Evidence depicted the positive results of nursing care for clients, health care professionals and facilities. The research results were implemented at different facilities using several research designs, from descriptive to experimental. A clinical pathway was used as a tool in various clinical situations including in emergency, elective surgery, and pre-post-surgery, as well as in common clinical cases. It was administered by the health care professionals in providing care, encompassing the comprehensive process from diagnosis to clinical audit. Health care professionals should engage in active collaboration during the implementation of a clinical care pathway. In implementing the standard of input, process, and outcome of care to clients, health care professionals should emphasize the process and outcome of care and eliminate unnecessary or inefficient treatments.

**Conclusions:** A clinical care pathway could reduce the average length of stay for patients, increase cost effectiveness, and, consequently, improve the quality of service. To optimize the care process, the pathway should be implemented of multidisciplinary health care team.

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## Introduction

Health care services must be continuously improved in terms of quality and cost effectiveness. The quality, efficiency, and accessibility of health care services is one of the research priorities in health care management<sup>1</sup>. Hospitals commonly skip giving thorough and evidence-based infor-

mation regarding treatments to patients and their families because the patients response is different<sup>2</sup>.

A clinical pathway is a strategy to support evidence-based practice and is efficient to guide the implementation clinical treatment for various patient conditions. It comprises the algorithms which are illustrated by flow charts, a set of decisions, and complete treatment<sup>3,4</sup> aimed at an optimal

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treatment process through systematic and timely interprofessional decision-making and interventions<sup>5</sup>. A clinical pathway is a strategy to improve collaboration between physicians, case managers, nurses, pharmacists, physiotherapists, and other health professionals<sup>6</sup>.

It is necessary to discern to what extent a clinical pathway affects the collaboration between health care professionals and the quality of health care services. Therefore, in this paper, we present our findings based on a review of literature related to clinical pathways.

## Method

Literature relevant to clinical pathways published from 2000 to 2015 was reviewed. Articles were searched through electronic databases, including Medline, Clinical of Nursing, Advanced Nursing, Elsevier, BMC Medicine, Implementation Science, Trials, and EMA. We used the following search terms: clinical pathways, care pathways, and interprofessional collaboration. Articles were collected and selected according to predetermined keywords, without restriction on the study method of the articles. The review included the title, abstract, research objectives, research methods, instruments used, and research results<sup>7</sup>.

The selected literature consisted of original articles from countries in Asia, Europe, and the USA. These articles consisted of quantitative and qualitative research related to clinical pathways, care pathways, and interprofessional collaboration to improve the quality of service. Research was carried out in health facilities, and study designs comprised the following: cluster randomized clinical trials (cRCT), quasi-experimental, cohort, case-control, case studies, and focus group discussions.

## Results

A total of 44 articles were obtained from the search. Of these, 20 articles were excluded as they did not meet the criteria of the original paper. We finally reviewed 24 articles with the following designs: 4 cluster randomized clinical trial (cRCT), 6 quasi-experiments, 6 cohorts, 1 case-control, 4 case studies, 1 interview, and 2 focus group discussions.

The quantitative samples of the reviewed articles covered of a variety of clinical conditions: pneumonia, heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and post-surgery. The reviewed articles also reported response on health care team related to clinical pathway. The articles were categorized into interprofessional collaboration and clinical care pathways.

## Interprofessional collaboration

Interprofessional collaboration is the service provided by a team of different health care professionals and is essential to ensure effective clinical treatment<sup>8</sup>. The health care team performs interrelation and interaction throughout the input, process, and output of patient care<sup>6</sup>. Members actively collaborate in implementing comprehensive nursing

care. The process involves multidisciplinary interventions with a focus on predetermined outcomes<sup>9</sup>.

Patients as a service centered care should be elaborated in the implementation of the nursing process to boost patient recovery and to improve efficiency and service quality<sup>10</sup>. The key to successful interprofessional collaboration is communication, which should be carried out continuously between the health care team and the patient. Patient satisfaction is an indicator of the success of the interprofessional collaboration. The health care team should have the same perception of the quality of service<sup>11</sup> (Table 1).

## Clinical care pathway

A search for "clinical pathway" turned up many terms in the collated published literature: clinical pathway, care pathway, integrated clinical pathway, integrated care pathway, and wellness pathway. Evidence-based clinical pathway could be defined as a strategy<sup>4</sup>, standard, diagnosis, and procedure for health personnel when performing comprehensive patient care<sup>13</sup>.

A clinical pathway can be used in all types of clinical settings, ranging from emergency, elective surgery, pre- and post-surgery, or general health facilities. It can identify the condition of the patient at the hospital, clinic, or the patient's home. A clinical pathway is a standard of care delivery that begins with assessment, diagnosis, information support, rehabilitation, and clinical audit<sup>13</sup>. The pathway can also help to identify the critical components impeding patient care or supporting facilities<sup>3</sup>.

A clinical pathway provides detailed instructions for each part of patient management according to the specific condition within a certain period, patient progress, and the expected outcome. The pathway generally describes the types of clinical treatment based on patient needs, in the form of algorithms for planning and systematic management of patients with specific diseases and diagnoses<sup>14</sup>. The flow of the clinical pathway must be brief and concise to guide all health professionals in care delivery. Nurses play an important role in comprehensive patient care by conducting nursing assessment, monitoring, intervention, evaluation, and rehabilitation<sup>10,15</sup>.

In one study we reviewed, a clinical pathway was used in thrombolytic treatment for patients with acute myocardial infarction (AMI) in rural areas. The AMI mortality rate in rural areas is remarkably high since the administration of thrombolytic therapy is not considered the emergency

**Table 1** Typology of interprofessional collaboration

Category	Subcategory	References
Interrelation and interaction	Doctor, nurses, physiotherapists, and social workers	4-6,9
Communication	Health care professional and patient	10-12
Quality improvement	Input, process, and output	2,3,6

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