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THE INTEGRATED CARE HUB: A MODEL FOR STREAMLINING PATIENT JOURNEYS ACROSS HEALTH DISCIPLINES

TURKI DHAWI ALOTAIBI[1], ALI ABDULLAH ALGHAMMASS[2], ABDULLAH HAMAD ALANAZI[3], FALAH MAZEED ALMUTAIRI[4], ABDULMAJEED ALHARBI[5], HASSAN ALQATHAMI[6], THAMER ALMARZOOQI[7], ABDULRAHMAN AL QETHAMI[8], ABDALMALIK ALRBEAI[9], MOHAMMED ALI ALAHMARI[10], TALAL MUTLAQ AL-HARBI[11], HANAN HASSAN JALWAI ALANEZI[12], ABDULMAJEED LAFI IBRAHIM ALOTAIBI[13]

[1] HEALTH TECHNICIAN, KING ABDULAZIZ MEDICAL CITY, RIYADH
[2] LABORATORY MEDICINE, KING ABDULAZIZ MEDICAL CITY
[3] PHARMACIST, KING ABDULAZIZ MEDICAL CITY, RIYADH, EMAIL: anazia@ngha.med.sa
[4] PHARMACY TECHNICIAN, KING ABDULAZIZ MEDICAL CITY, RIYADH
[5] PHARMACY TECHNICIAN, KING ABDULAZIZ MEDICAL CITY, RIYADH, EMAIL: alharbia28@mngha.med.sa
[6] PHARMACY TECHNICIAN, PHARMACEUTICAL CARE, KING SALMAN SPECIALIST HOSPITAL
[7] PHARMACY TECHNICIAN, PHARMACEUTICAL CARE, KING SALMAN SPECIALIST HOSPITAL
[8] PHARMACY TECHNICIAN, PHARMACEUTICAL CARE, KING SALMAN SPECIALIST HOSPITAL
[9] PHARMACY TECHNICIAN, NATIONAL GUARD HEALTH AFFAIRS
[10] HEALTH INFORMATION TECHNICIAN, NATIONAL GUARD HEALTH AFFAIRS TAIF
[11] HEALTH INFORMATION TECHNICIAN, EMAIL: alharbita10@mngha.med.sa
[12] NURSE, PUBLIC HEALTH TO PROMOTE SCHOOL HEALTH
[13] HEALTH ADMINISTRATION TECH.III

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Abstract

Healthcare fragmentation creates significant challenges for patients navigating complex systems across multiple disciplines, resulting in inefficient care delivery, potential safety risks, and suboptimal patient experiences. This study examines the Integrated Care Hub (ICH) as an innovative model for streamlining patient journeys across health disciplines. Drawing on current literature and emerging evidence, we explore the theoretical foundations of integrated care, key components of the ICH model, implementation considerations, benefits, challenges, and future directions. The ICH model encompasses central coordination and navigation, shared electronic health records, multidisciplinary teams, standardized care pathways, patient engagement, technology infrastructure, and continuous quality improvement processes. Evidence suggests this approach can improve clinical outcomes, enhance patient experiences, increase efficiency, promote equity, and boost provider satisfaction. However, implementation faces challenges including organizational complexity, funding sustainability, technology barriers, professional boundaries, and evidence gaps. Future development will likely be influenced by digital integration, population health management, value-based payment models, patient-driven design, and cross-sector collaboration. By focusing on the patient journey and breaking down traditional silos between health disciplines, the ICH model offers significant potential to transform healthcare delivery in increasingly resource-constrained environments.

INTRODUCTION

Healthcare delivery has historically been characterized by fragmentation, with patients often required to navigate complex, disconnected systems across multiple disciplines and settings. This fragmentation results in care that is frequently inefficient, potentially unsafe, and fails to provide a seamless experience for patients (Davidson et al., 2021). In response to these challenges, integrated care models have emerged as a promising approach to healthcare transformation. The Integrated Care Hub (ICH) represents an innovative model designed to streamline patient journeys across health disciplines by creating a centralized system of coordinated care delivery.

As healthcare systems globally face mounting pressures from aging populations, increasing chronic disease prevalence, and finite resources, the need for more effective and efficient models of care has never been more urgent (Correia de Matos et al., 2025). The ICH model responds to this need by reimagining healthcare delivery

from a patient-centric perspective, breaking down traditional silos between health disciplines, and creating pathways that facilitate smoother transitions across the continuum of care.

This study explores the concept of the Integrated Care Hub as a transformative model for healthcare delivery, examining its theoretical foundations, key components, implementation considerations, potential benefits, challenges, and future directions. By drawing on emerging evidence and real-world examples, we aim to provide a comprehensive overview of how the ICH model can revolutionize the patient journey across health disciplines.

Theoretical Foundations of Integrated Care

The concept of integrated care has evolved considerably over the past decades, moving from simple coordination between providers to more comprehensive approaches that encompass clinical, professional, organizational, and system integration (Correia de Matos et al., 2025). At its core, integrated care seeks to improve patient experiences and outcomes by ensuring that services are well-coordinated, efficient, and delivered without unnecessary duplication or gaps.

Integrated care pathways (ICPs) represent a structured approach to delivering integrated care, providing "structured multidisciplinary care plans which detail essential steps in the care of patients with a specific clinical problem" (National Council for the Professional Development of Nursing and Midwifery, 2006, p. 5). These pathways aim to standardize care processes, reduce variations in practice, and improve coordination across different healthcare providers and settings.

The evolution from ICPs to the more comprehensive Integrated Care Hub model reflects a growing recognition of the need for healthcare systems that are not only clinically integrated but also organizationally and systemically aligned. The ICH model builds upon these foundations by creating a central coordination point that facilitates seamless transitions between different healthcare disciplines and settings, guided by patient needs rather than organizational boundaries.

Understanding the Patient Journey

To effectively design an Integrated Care Hub, it is essential to understand the patient journey—the sequence of interactions, processes, and experiences that a patient undergoes throughout their healthcare experience. McCarthy et al. (2020) introduced the "Integrated Patient Journey Map" as a design tool for embedding quality in health information technology solutions, emphasizing the importance of mapping the patient's path through the healthcare system to identify opportunities for integration and improvement.

George and Brown (2023) further highlight the value of understanding patient journeys in integrated care, noting that these journeys often reveal significant challenges in transitions between different healthcare settings and disciplines. Their research identifies several common problems in patient journeys, including:

1. Fragmented communication between providers
2. Duplication of assessments and procedures
3. Delays in referrals and treatment
4. Lack of clarity regarding roles and responsibilities
5. Poor information sharing
6. Inadequate patient engagement and education

By mapping and analyzing these journeys, healthcare organizations can identify critical intervention points where integration can significantly improve the patient experience and outcomes. Cassidy et al. (2024) advocate for "flipping healthcare" by including the patient perspective in integrated care pathway design, ensuring that integration efforts are genuinely responsive to patient needs rather than simply organizational imperatives.

Key Components of the Integrated Care Hub Model

The Integrated Care Hub model comprises several interconnected components designed to facilitate seamless patient journeys across health disciplines:

1. Central Coordination and Navigation

At the heart of the ICH model is a central coordination function that helps patients navigate the healthcare system. This typically involves care coordinators or navigators who work across disciplinary boundaries to ensure that patients receive appropriate, timely care without unnecessary duplication or gaps (Traylor et al., 2025). These coordinators serve as the primary point of contact for patients, helping them to understand and navigate their care journey.

2. Shared Electronic Health Records

A critical enabler of integration is the implementation of shared electronic health records that allow for secure, real-time information sharing across different healthcare providers and settings. Isaacs and Mitchell (2024) identify integrated electronic health records as a key factor in successful mental health integration in primary care, noting their potential to "expand patient care beyond the traditional primary care setting by integrating medical and mental health information streams with telehealth, social services, etc." (p. 8).

3. Multidisciplinary Teams and Co-location

The ICH model emphasizes multidisciplinary teamwork, often facilitated by the co-location of different healthcare disciplines within a single physical or virtual space. This approach promotes collaboration, communication, and coordination between different healthcare professionals, enabling more holistic and comprehensive care (Bhatia et al., 2019). Co-location has been particularly effective in mental health integration, where having mental health professionals physically present in primary care settings has been shown to improve access and outcomes (Isaacs & Mitchell, 2024).

4. Standardized Care Pathways

Building on the concept of integrated care pathways, the ICH model incorporates standardized, evidence-based care pathways that detail the essential steps in managing specific health conditions or situations. These pathways provide a framework for coordination, ensuring that patients receive consistent, high-quality care regardless of which providers they see or where they receive care (Chow et al., 2020). Importantly, these pathways are designed to be flexible enough to accommodate individual patient needs and preferences.

5. Patient Engagement and Empowerment

Recognizing the central role of patients in their own healthcare, the ICH model emphasizes patient engagement, education, and empowerment. This includes involving patients in the design of care pathways, providing them with the information and tools they need to manage their health, and ensuring that their preferences and goals are incorporated into care planning (Cassidy et al., 2024).

6. Technology Infrastructure

Advanced technology infrastructure supports the ICH model, enabling virtual care, remote monitoring, data analytics, and efficient communication. This infrastructure allows the hub to extend beyond physical boundaries, ensuring that patients can access coordinated care regardless of their location or mobility constraints (McCarthy et al., 2020).

7. Quality Improvement and Evaluation

Finally, the ICH model incorporates continuous quality improvement processes, using data and feedback to identify opportunities for enhancement and innovation. This involves regular monitoring of key performance indicators, patient-reported outcomes, and patient experience measures to ensure that the model is meeting its objectives and adapting to changing needs (Chow et al., 2020).

Implementation Considerations

Implementing an Integrated Care Hub requires careful planning, stakeholder engagement, and attention to various contextual factors. Key considerations include:

Organizational Readiness and Culture

Successful implementation of the ICH model depends on organizational readiness and a supportive culture. Isaacs and Mitchell (2024) identify "willingness to accept and promote system change" as a critical factor in implementing integrated mental health care, noting the importance of having "individuals with deep institutional vision" who can serve as champions for integration (p. 8).

Funding and Payment Models

Traditional fee-for-service payment models often create barriers to integration by incentivizing volume rather than coordination and outcomes. Implementing the ICH model may require new payment approaches, such as bundled payments, shared savings models, or population-based funding, that better support integrated care delivery (Correia de Matos et al., 2025). Isaacs and Mitchell (2024) note that "a case has been made for new payment models to be developed that enable implementation of mental health integrated care" (p. 9).

Workforce Development

The ICH model requires healthcare professionals who are skilled in collaborative practice, care coordination, and patient-centered care. This may necessitate new training programs, role definitions, and professional development opportunities to prepare the workforce for integrated care delivery (Traylor et al., 2025).

Technology Infrastructure

Implementing shared electronic health records and other supporting technologies is often a significant challenge in establishing an Integrated Care Hub. This requires attention to interoperability standards, data governance, privacy considerations, and user experience design (McCarthy et al., 2020).

Policy and Regulatory Environment

The policy and regulatory environment can either facilitate or hinder integrated care implementation. Issues such as licensure requirements, scope of practice regulations, privacy laws, and funding mechanisms all need to be considered in the design and implementation of an ICH model (Bhatia et al., 2019).

Stakeholder Engagement

Engaging all relevant stakeholders—including patients, healthcare providers, administrators, payers, and policymakers—is essential for successful implementation. Cassidy et al. (2024) emphasize the particular importance of meaningful patient involvement in the design of integrated care pathways, advocating for approaches that "flip healthcare" by prioritizing the patient perspective.

Benefits of the Integrated Care Hub Model

Research and practical experience suggest that the Integrated Care Hub model can deliver numerous benefits for patients, providers, and healthcare systems:

Improved Patient Outcomes

Evidence indicates that integrated care models can lead to better clinical outcomes across a range of conditions. For example, in mental health integration, studies have shown improvements in depression symptoms, treatment adherence, and overall functioning (Isaacs & Mitchell, 2024).

Enhanced Patient Experience

Davidson et al. (2021) found that patients generally report positive experiences with integrated care models in the United Kingdom, highlighting benefits such as improved access, continuity, and coordination. Patients particularly

value having a single point of contact, receiving consistent information, and experiencing seamless transitions between services.

Increased Efficiency

By reducing duplication, streamlining processes, and facilitating earlier intervention, the ICH model has the potential to increase efficiency and reduce healthcare costs (Chow et al., 2020). This is particularly important in the context of growing healthcare demands and constrained resources.

Better Access and Equity

The ICH model can help to address inequities in healthcare access by removing barriers and providing support for navigation. Isaacs and Mitchell (2024) note that integrated care models can overcome barriers to seeking help for problems such as substance abuse, including "lack of awareness of the problem, inadequate social support, fear of treatment, privacy concerns, and lack of treatment availability" (p. 9).

Improved Provider Satisfaction

Healthcare providers often report greater job satisfaction when working in well-implemented integrated care models, citing benefits such as better communication, more comprehensive care delivery, and improved ability to meet patient needs (Traylor et al., 2025).

Challenges and Limitations

Despite its potential benefits, the Integrated Care Hub model faces several challenges and limitations:

Implementation Complexity

Establishing an ICH requires significant organizational change, which can be complex, time-consuming, and resource-intensive. Resistance to change, competing priorities, and implementation fatigue can all hinder successful adoption (Correia de Matos et al., 2025).

Funding and Sustainability

Sustainable funding mechanisms for integrated care remain a challenge in many healthcare systems. As Isaacs and Mitchell (2024) note, "bringing mental health care into the primary health setting will therefore require a new funding model" (p. 9). Without appropriate financial incentives and sustainable funding, integrated care initiatives may struggle to maintain momentum.

Technology Barriers

Implementing the shared electronic health records and other technological infrastructure required for effective integration can be technically challenging and costly. Issues of interoperability, data quality, and user acceptance all need to be addressed (McCarthy et al., 2020).

Professional Boundaries and Culture

Professional silos, hierarchies, and differing practice cultures can create barriers to effective multidisciplinary collaboration. Overcoming these barriers requires attention to team development, role clarity, and cultural change (George & Brown, 2023).

Evidence Gaps

While the evidence base for integrated care is growing, there remain significant gaps in our understanding of which integration approaches work best in different contexts and for different patient populations (Davidson et al., 2021). This can make it difficult to design and implement evidence-based integrated care hubs.

CONCLUSION

The Integrated Care Hub represents a promising model for streamlining patient journeys across health disciplines, offering potential benefits in terms of patient outcomes, experiences, efficiency, access, and provider satisfaction. By bringing together central coordination, shared electronic health records, multidisciplinary teams, standardized care pathways, patient engagement, advanced technology, and continuous quality improvement, the ICH model addresses many of the fragmentation challenges that have historically plagued healthcare delivery.

However, implementing this model is not without challenges, requiring attention to organizational readiness, funding models, workforce development, technology infrastructure, policy environments, and stakeholder engagement. Future development of the ICH model will likely be shaped by advances in digital health, population health management, value-based payment, patient-driven design, and cross-sector integration.

As healthcare systems globally continue to grapple with growing demands and constrained resources, the Integrated Care Hub offers a vision of healthcare delivery that is more coordinated, efficient, and patient-centered. By focusing on the patient journey and breaking down traditional silos between health disciplines, this model has the potential to transform healthcare delivery and improve outcomes for patients, providers, and systems alike.

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