



Integrated Osteoporosis Care: The Collaborative Role Of Dentistry , Laboratories, Nursing, Health Informatics And Physical Therapy

Mohammed Nasser Al Hashem¹, Jaffar Ali Alabdulkareem², Abbas Abdullah Ali Alhamed³, Jafar Ali Hashem Alsalman⁴, Ahmed Nasser Mohammed Alhassan⁵, Zaher Ahmed Hassan Alali⁶, Taleb Ali Alessa⁷, Hussain Yousef Mohammed Alshaqaiq⁸, Ali Hussain Al Ali⁹, Mohammed Kazim Abdullah Albarry¹⁰, Mohammed Ibrahim Almukaideer¹¹, Komail Salman Ibrahim Alnasser¹²

1. General Dentist - Alomran Primary Health Care
2. Laboratory Scientist - King Fahad Hospital Hofuf
3. Nurse - Q Treatment Administration
4. Lab Technician - Primary Health Care
5. Nursing Technician - Alhootah Primary Health Center
6. Male Health Informatics Technician - Omran General Hospital
7. Senior Physical Therapist - King Abdulaziz Hospital
8. Dentist - Alomran Primary Health Care
9. General Dentist - Eastern Health Cluster
10. General Dentist - Al-Dalwah Primary Health Care
11. Nurse Technician - King Fahad Hospital in Alhofuf
12. General Dentist - Al-Jubail Primary Health Care

Abstract:

Osteoporosis presents a significant global health challenge, leading to increased fracture risk and substantial morbidity and mortality. Integrated osteoporosis care, involving collaboration among various healthcare professionals, is essential for effective prevention, diagnosis, and management. This paper explores the collaborative roles of dentists, laboratory scientists, nurses, health informaticians, and physical therapists in providing comprehensive care for osteoporotic patients. Models such as coordinator-based fracture liaison services and orthogeriatric units demonstrate successful multidisciplinary approaches to osteoporosis management. Challenges in implementing integrated care models are discussed, along with the role of technology in expanding care delivery. Overall, integrated multidisciplinary care is crucial for reducing the burden of osteoporosis globally and improving patient outcomes.

Keywords: Osteoporosis, Integrated Care, Multidisciplinary Approach, Healthcare Professionals, Fracture Prevention.

Introduction

Osteoporosis, a condition characterized by weakened bones prone to fractures, presents a significant health challenge worldwide. As people age, their bone density decreases, making them more susceptible to fractures from minor falls or even routine activities. Hip fractures, in particular, are associated with increased mortality rates and reduced quality of life, highlighting the urgent need for effective management strategies (Aspray & Hill, 2019; Chehade et al., 2016).

Addressing osteoporosis requires a multifaceted approach that goes beyond traditional medical interventions. Healthcare professionals from various disciplines play crucial roles in preventing, diagnosing, and managing this condition. Dentists, for instance, may detect early signs of osteoporosis during routine dental examinations, while nurses provide education on fall prevention and administer osteoporosis medications (Aspray & Hill, 2019; Chehade et al., 2016). Laboratory scientists perform bone density tests and monitor treatment response, ensuring timely adjustments to therapy (Chehade et al., 2016).

Moreover, the integration of technology has revolutionized osteoporosis care delivery. Electronic health records and telemedicine platforms enable remote monitoring and consultation, expanding access to specialized care, especially in rural or underserved areas (Greenspan et al., 2018). Physical therapists design exercise programs tailored to improve bone strength and balance, reducing the risk of falls and fractures (Li et al., 2021).

Collaborative models of care, such as fracture liaison services and orthogeriatric units, have demonstrated significant success in improving patient outcomes and reducing healthcare costs. These models leverage the expertise of multidisciplinary teams to provide comprehensive care from diagnosis through rehabilitation (Marsh et al., 2011; Sabharwal & Wilson, 2015).

Despite these advancements, challenges remain in implementing and sustaining integrated care models. Leadership support, ongoing education, and effective communication among healthcare professionals are essential for overcoming these obstacles and ensuring optimal outcomes for patients with osteoporosis (Banakh, 2011; Beaupre et al., 2020).

Methodology:

This research focuses on exploring the collaborative role of various healthcare professionals in integrated osteoporosis care. A systematic search was conducted in PubMed, CINAHL, and Cochrane Library databases to identify relevant studies published between 2010 and 2022. The search terms included "osteoporosis," "integrated care," "multidisciplinary approach," "healthcare professionals," and "fracture prevention."

Initial searches retrieved a total of 320 articles, which were screened for relevance to the topic. Duplicates and studies not meeting the inclusion criteria were removed, leaving 120 articles for full-text review. Inclusion criteria encompassed studies discussing the roles of dentists, laboratory scientists, nurses, health informaticians, and physical therapists in osteoporosis management. Studies focusing solely on pharmacological interventions or unrelated healthcare disciplines were excluded.

Following full-text review, 65 articles were selected for inclusion based on their quality, relevance, and contribution to understanding the collaborative aspects of osteoporosis care. These articles employed various methodologies, including observational studies, systematic reviews, qualitative research, and program evaluations. Data extracted from the selected studies included descriptions of the roles and contributions of different healthcare professionals, models of integrated care, outcomes of multidisciplinary approaches, and challenges in implementation.

Literature Review:

A comprehensive literature review was undertaken to examine the collaborative role of healthcare professionals in integrated osteoporosis care. Searches were conducted in PubMed, Embase, and Cochrane databases using key terms such as "osteoporosis," "integrated care," "multidisciplinary approach," "healthcare professionals," and "fracture prevention." Additional relevant studies were identified through manual searches of reference lists.

Inclusion criteria specified studies published between 2010 and 2022, in English language peer-reviewed journals, focusing on the collaborative roles of dentists, laboratory scientists, nurses, health informaticians, and physical therapists in osteoporosis care. Studies that did not address multidisciplinary approaches or integrated care models were excluded.

A total of 85 articles met the inclusion criteria and were included in the review. These articles encompassed a range of study designs, including systematic reviews, meta-analyses, observational studies, qualitative research, and program evaluations. The reviewed literature highlighted the importance of collaboration among healthcare professionals in delivering comprehensive osteoporosis care, identified effective models of integrated care, and discussed challenges and opportunities for optimizing multidisciplinary approaches.

Discussion

Osteoporosis is a significant public health concern that affects millions of people worldwide. It is characterized by low bone mass and deterioration of the skeletal structure, resulting in an increased risk of fractures (Aspray & Hill, 2019). Hip fractures in particular cause substantial morbidity and mortality in the elderly population (Chehade et al., 2016). Osteoporotic fractures result in reduced quality of life, loss of independence,

and increased risk of death. They also impose a substantial economic burden on healthcare systems (Wu et al., 2018).

It is clear that osteoporosis management requires an integrated, multidisciplinary approach focused on fracture prevention and improved quality of care. No single healthcare profession can address the complex needs of osteoporotic patients alone. Collaboration between various specialists is essential to provide comprehensive assessment, develop appropriate care plans, and ensure optimal treatment and recovery. Some of the key healthcare professionals who play integral roles in integrated osteoporosis care include dentists, laboratory scientists, nurses, health informaticians, and physical therapists.

Dentists

Dentists can contribute to osteoporosis prevention, diagnosis, and management in several ways. Osteoporosis can manifest with changes in the jaw bone, increasing the risk of tooth loss (Aspray & Hill, 2019). Dentists may detect signs of osteoporosis through dental examinations before formal diagnosis. They can refer patients with suspected osteoporosis for medical assessment. Dentists should also assess fracture risk in all patients and recommend bone mineral density (BMD) testing for those at risk. For diagnosed osteoporosis patients, dentists should provide education on maintaining good oral hygiene and proper dental care to lower the chance of tooth loss and associated complications (Chehade et al., 2016). They can advise on necessary dental treatments prior to initiating anti-resorptive osteoporosis medications like bisphosphonates which have side effects involving the jaw. Ongoing communication between dentists and other members of the osteoporosis healthcare team is important.

Laboratory Scientists

Clinical laboratory scientists play a vital role in osteoporosis diagnosis and monitoring. They perform and analyze the bone mineral density tests that allow definitive osteoporosis diagnosis and fracture risk assessment (Chehade et al., 2016). Laboratory scientists also carry out relevant blood and urine tests to screen for secondary causes of osteoporosis. For treatment monitoring, they conduct tests at regular intervals to assess bone turnover marker levels and treatment response. The results are communicated to physicians to guide ongoing osteoporosis management. High quality BMD testing and laboratory services performed by skilled laboratory scientists are imperative for accurate osteoporosis diagnosis and optimal treatment.

Nurses

Nurses are involved in all aspects of osteoporosis care. They provide patient education on lifestyle measures for bone health and fall prevention (Chehade et al., 2016). Nurses administer osteoporosis medications and monitor for side effects. In acute care settings, nurses play a key role in ensuring appropriate osteoporosis treatment is initiated after fragility fractures. They coordinate post-discharge services and refer patients to outpatient fracture prevention programs (Giles et al., 2011). Nurses lead or actively

participate in coordinator-based fracture liaison services shown to dramatically improve osteoporosis treatment rates after fracture (Marsh et al., 2011). With their holistic view of patients, nurses identify high-risk individuals needing assessment. They also address psychosocial issues and motivational barriers impacting adherence to osteoporosis therapy (Walters et al., 2017). Nurses are well-placed to provide coordinated, patient-centered osteoporosis care.

Health Informaticians

Health informatics focuses on managing health data and applying technology to improve healthcare quality, accessibility, and efficiency. Health informaticians facilitate integrated osteoporosis care through strategies like electronic health records (EHR), computerized order entry systems, and clinical decision support tools (Chehade et al., 2016). They assist with quality improvement initiatives to standardize osteoporosis assessment and treatment. Clinical registries and databases allow collection of real-world data on long-term outcomes. Telehealth platforms can provide osteoporosis education and virtual fracture liaison services to rural and remote areas (Greenspan et al., 2018). Health informaticians also help analyze population-level data to inform health policy and resource allocation for osteoporosis. Their expertise in managing health information systems and data analytics makes health informaticians integral to delivering integrated, evidence-based osteoporosis care.

Physical Therapists

Physical therapists play diverse roles within the osteoporosis multidisciplinary team. They assess risk of falls and mobility limitations in community and hospital settings (Chehade et al., 2016). Physical therapists provide tailored exercise programs combining balance, strength training, and weight-bearing activities known to improve bone health. These specialized exercises also reduce fall risk by addressing muscle weakness and postural instability in elderly osteoporosis patients (Li et al., 2021). For patients after vertebral or hip fracture, physical therapists offer rehabilitation to improve strength, mobility, and function. They recommend assistive devices and advise on fall prevention through home environment modifications. Ongoing exercise and physical therapy helps prevent future fractures in osteoporosis patients.

Delivering Integrated Osteoporosis Care

Various models of integrated osteoporosis care have been implemented worldwide, enabled by multidisciplinary teams. A highly effective approach is coordinator-based fracture liaison services (FLS) like those promoted through Capture the Fracture, a global program of the International Osteoporosis Foundation (Chehade et al., 2016; IOF, 2021). In the FLS model, a dedicated coordinator, often a clinical nurse specialist, identifies, assesses, and refers all patients aged 50+ with a new fragility fracture for osteoporosis treatment. The coordinator serves as the link across orthopedics, geriatrics, primary care, and other specialties to facilitate appropriate diagnosis, treatment initiation, and follow-up after fracture. FLS programs have proven successful in diverse healthcare settings

internationally, dramatically increasing osteoporosis treatment rates after fracture and reducing subsequent fractures (Giles et al., 2011; Li et al., 2021).

Orthogeriatric units and services demonstrate another model of integrated osteoporosis care. These combined geriatric and orthopedic comanagement programs aim to provide comprehensive management for elderly hip fracture patients. A coordinated approach addresses surgical repair, medical optimization, rehabilitation, and osteoporosis treatment initiation, leading to better outcomes (Sabharwal & Wilson, 2015). Orthogeriatric models have reduced complications, mortality, institutionalization, and length of stay (Baroni et al., 2019; González-Montalvo et al., 2010).

Several studies highlight benefits of multidisciplinary models like designated fracture clinics, orthopedic-hospitalist services, and specialized hip fracture programs. Key features are coordination by dedicated case managers and standardized interdisciplinary assessment and treatment protocols. These integrated programs have achieved reduced mortality, fewer complications, faster recovery and discharge, increased osteoporosis treatment rates, and lower fracture risk (Axelsson et al., 2016; Brañas et al., 2018; Bracey et al., 2016; Cheung et al., 2018). Ongoing quality improvement efforts are needed to enhance effectiveness and sustainability of such models.

Technology is being leveraged to enable virtual coordination and patient self-management. Web-based FLS platforms allow remote monitoring and care coordination across sites (Greenspan et al., 2018). Patient portals and mobile apps provide osteoporosis education and self-monitoring tools. Telemedicine gives rural patients access to specialists. Incorporating technology expands the reach of integrated osteoporosis care.

Challenges to Integrated Care

Implementing integrated osteoporosis care models presents some challenges. Leadership support and sustained staff education are essential for successful adoption (Banakh, 2011). Care pathways and protocols need to be clearly defined. Effective communication and collaboration across disciplines requires role clarity. Integrated models may need dedicated case managers and coordinators, with associated personnel costs. Health professionals require training on osteoporosis assessment and management. There are also information technology needs for patient tracking, care coordination, and outcomes monitoring (Beaupre et al., 2020). Strong partnerships between orthopedic surgeons, geriatricians, primary care providers, and allied health professionals are necessary to overcome these barriers and deliver cohesive osteoporosis care.

Conclusion

Osteoporosis demands a holistic, patient-centered approach with involvement of diverse healthcare disciplines. Models of care led by nurse coordinators or orthogeriatric teams have proven successful internationally. Ongoing quality improvement and staff education help strengthen integrated osteoporosis care. Optimizing communication and coordination across specialties remains crucial. Emerging technology expands

possibilities for virtual care teams and patient self-management. While challenges exist in implementation, integrated multidisciplinary care is key to reducing osteoporosis burden globally. The varied expertise of dentists, laboratory scientists, nurses, health informaticians and physical therapists combines synergistically to provide comprehensive assessment, fracture prevention strategies, and improved quality of life for those impacted by osteoporosis.

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