

## Multidisciplinary Team Working in Rehabilitation Medicine: Advantages and challenges.

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### Abstract

Healthcare is delivered in a very complicated environment where numerous variables affect the patient related outcomes. A multidisciplinary team that places a high priority on patient satisfaction and healthcare quality can help to simplify and manage the environment of complex healthcare delivery. The foundation of rehabilitation treatments is a multidisciplinary team approach to provide interventions and care for the patients. Regardless of the population studied, multidisciplinary rehabilitation has been shown to be more effective than therapy delivered by individual therapists in a number of different populations. Due to the patient's complex impairments, a team-based approach is necessary for assessments and facilitates coordinated care planning in the rehabilitation settings. The aim of this paper is to offer a narrative review of the advantages and challenges of multidisciplinary team working. The key components of teamwork in rehabilitation are the individualization of patient care and effective team communication.

**Keywords:** Multidisciplinary; Teams; Rehabilitation; Outcomes; Challenges.

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.47391/JPMA.24-13>

### Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) has defined rehabilitation as "a set of interventions designed to optimize functioning and reduce disability in individuals with health conditions in interaction with their environment"<sup>1</sup>. Physical medicine and rehabilitation (PMR) utilises the World Health Organisation (WHO) Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) for assessing health status. The ICF recognises human functioning focussing on the consequences and not on the causes of the limits of functioning.<sup>2</sup> The ICF views a person's level of functioning as the result of a complex interaction between personal, environmental, and health-

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related factors. It is a biopsychosocial model of disability that combines the social and medical approaches to the concept.

Wagner defined multidisciplinary teamwork in context of chronic disease care as "a group of diverse clinicians who communicate with each other regularly about the care of a defined group of patients and participate in that care".<sup>3</sup> In PMR practice, a multidisciplinary team refers to a group of healthcare professionals from different disciplines who work together to provide comprehensive and coordinated care for persons with disabilities (PWD). These may include the PMR physician, physical therapist, occupational therapist, speech and language pathologist, rehabilitation nurse and clinical psychologist. Depending upon the patient's diagnosis and disability, other team members like orthotist, vocational counsellor, social worker and peer counsellor can be added. The two main characteristics of the optimal multidisciplinary care in rehabilitation include development of individualised interventions, based on the patients' goals, and evaluation of the method used to attain these goals. The patient and the family/ caregivers are at the centre of any interventions.<sup>4,5</sup> This review aims to highlight advantages of multidisciplinary team working in the rehabilitation settings, discuss some of the challenges and suggest strategies to improve multidisciplinary working to improve patients' outcomes.

### Advantages of multidisciplinary team working in rehabilitation

Momsen et al in 2012 reviewed the current scientific evidence about the effectiveness of multidisciplinary team rehabilitation for different health problems. They concluded that despite the variety of interventions and levels of multidisciplinary team care, it promotes the effects of rehabilitation compared with the control group or standard rehabilitation care in 10 of 12 patient groups.<sup>6</sup> There are several advantages to using a multidisciplinary team approach in rehabilitation. Some of the main benefits include:

**1. Comprehensive care:** A multidisciplinary team can provide a range of services and interventions, including physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech and

language therapy, psychology, dietetics, rehabilitation nursing and rehabilitation medical management. The different members of the multidisciplinary team bring diversity of knowledge and skills and this can help ensure that all aspects of an individual's health and well-being are addressed in the rehabilitation process.<sup>7</sup> The joint assessment and care planning informed by the patients' own goals and decisions also help the team to implement ICF framework within their interventions.

**2. Communication:** Good and clear communication is mandatory for optimal delivery of healthcare.<sup>8</sup> Efficient rehabilitation interventions require strong relationships and co-operation, all of which depend on effective closed loop communication. Rehabilitation team members regularly communicate with each other to share information and insights, which can maintain transparency, improve the overall quality of care and ensure that all team members are working towards the same goals.

**3. Coordination of care:** A multidisciplinary team can help coordinate care among different healthcare providers, ensuring that all aspects of an individual's treatment plan are being implemented and that there is no duplication of efforts. Majority of inpatient rehabilitation setting use a single point of access such as a care coordinator or a keyworker to coordinate care throughout their journey from inpatient settings to the community settings. The keyworker or care coordinator also helps to support the families by facilitating the flow of information from the clinicians.

**4. Patient-centred care:** All healthcare decisions and quality assessment in patient-centred care are driven by the individual's health requirements and intended health outcomes.<sup>9</sup> By involving the PWD and their families in the rehabilitation process and taking their preferences and needs into account, a multidisciplinary team can provide care that is more tailored to the individual and that addresses their specific goals and concerns.

**5. Improved outcomes:** Research has shown that a multidisciplinary team approach can achieve better outcomes for PWD or chronic conditions.<sup>6,10</sup> For example, a review of studies on multidisciplinary rehabilitation for stroke found that this approach was associated with significant improvements in functional outcomes, such as mobility and independence.<sup>10</sup>

**6. Bridging Professional Boundaries:** The multidisciplinary teams have a significant role by reducing the organisational and cultural barriers and overcoming professional boundaries. By doing so, a

successful multidisciplinary team make it possible to provide comprehensive ongoing care for the patients with complex rehabilitation needs.

In addition to the aforementioned benefits, multidisciplinary teamwork in rehabilitation also results in less fragmentation of care,<sup>11</sup> more staff satisfaction,<sup>12</sup> and more effective and efficient use of resources.<sup>13</sup> This is particularly important for providing complex rehabilitation needs in developing countries.

### Challenges of multidisciplinary team working in rehabilitation

Despite the potential advantages of multidisciplinary teams, it can be difficult to collaborate and work with people from diverse backgrounds.<sup>14</sup> There are several challenges that can arise while working in a multidisciplinary team in rehabilitation settings. Some of the common challenges include:

**1. Issues with communication and coordination:** Different team members may have different approaches and perspectives, which can lead to communication breakdowns and difficulties coordinating care. Similarly, it is not always easy to clearly communicate the medical jargon to the patients and families that can lead to breakdown of communication between the patients and the multidisciplinary teams.

**2. Time constraints:** Team members may have busy schedules and competing demands, which can make it difficult to coordinate meetings and collaborate effectively. Team members might differ and compete for time allocation for a particular therapy and intervention due to limited time.

**3. Conflicting priorities:** Different team members may have different goals and priorities, regarding a particular patient which can lead to conflicts and difficulties in reaching consensus on treatment plans.

**4. Limited resources:** Creating and maintaining a multidisciplinary rehabilitation team is resource intensive. Different team members require a variety of resources, such as equipment and facilities, which can be expensive and may be in short supply.

**5. Training and development:** Team members may need ongoing training and support to learn how to work effectively in a multidisciplinary team and to develop the skills and knowledge needed to provide high-quality care.

**6. Incomplete multidisciplinary team:** Non-availability of all members of a multidisciplinary rehabilitation team is a challenge especially in the developing countries.

Despite these challenges, the benefits of a multidisciplinary team in rehabilitation often outweigh the challenges, and many organisations have implemented strategies to address these issues. For example, regular team meetings, clear communication channels, and the development of team-based policies and protocols can help facilitate effective collaboration and coordination among team members.

### Managing a multidisciplinary team working in rehabilitation

Several strategies can be used to effectively manage a multidisciplinary team in rehabilitation. Some of the key considerations include:

**1. Providing effective leadership:** Leadership is important in every speciality within medicine and PMR is no different. As a medical doctor within the team, emphasis should be made to learn leadership qualities and skills to be able to manage a multidisciplinary team.

**2. Clearly define roles and responsibilities:** It is important to establish clear roles and responsibilities for each team member, as well as the relationships between team members and the overall goals of the team at the beginning. This can help ensure that everyone understands their role and how they can contribute to the team's work while respecting the professional boundaries of other team members.

**3. Communicate effectively:** Establish clear and regular channels of closed loop communication among team members, such as regular meetings or updates via email or social media groups. This can help ensure that everyone is kept informed about team activities and can share ideas and concerns.

**4. Establish a collaborative culture:** Encourage team members to work together and share knowledge and expertise. This can foster a sense of teamwork and help ensure that all team members feel valued and supported.

**5. Promote ongoing training and development:** Provide ongoing training and support for team members to develop their skills and knowledge. This can help team members stay up to date with best practices and stay motivated and engaged in their work.

**6. Set clear realistic goals and expectations:** Establish clear realistic goals and expectations for the team and provide feedback and support to help team members meet these goals. This can help ensure that everyone is working towards the same objectives and that progress is being made.

**Shared goals and objectives:** According to several studies, personnel frequently do not comprehend their specific duties and responsibilities and/or do not share a common concept of the multidisciplinary team's aims and objectives.<sup>15</sup> Clear, realistic, and achievable goals must be recognised and accepted by all the multidisciplinary team members including the patients and their families, in order for the team to be successful.

### Conclusion

Overall, effective management of a multidisciplinary team in rehabilitation requires knowing own limitations, knowing when and where to get help from, willingness to engage other team members, acknowledging their professional roles, effective communication, adequate collaboration, and leadership skills. Effective communication and collaboration helps in establishing clear roles and responsibilities among team members. By ensuring provision of ongoing training and mutual support, team leaders can help in building a team that is able to work effectively to provide high-quality care for individuals with disabilities or chronic conditions.

**Disclaimer:** None.

**Conflict of Interest:** None.

**Source of Funding:** None.

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