

INTEGRATION OF CARE IN HOSPITAL MANAGEMENT: IMPACT ON THE QUALITY AND EFFICIENCY OF HEALTH SERVICES

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Abstract: This study analyzes the impact of care integration in hospital management on the quality and efficiency of health services. Through a systematic literature review of the past five years, 24 relevant studies were selected, addressing different aspects of care integration. The results indicate that care integration is associated with reduced hospital readmission rates, improved patient clinical outcomes, and increased patient satisfaction. Additionally, integration contributes to the operational efficiency of hospitals by reducing wait times for exams and consultations, optimizing the use of hospital resources, and lowering operational costs. Despite the benefits, implementation faces significant challenges such as resistance to change by healthcare professionals and the need for investments in technological infrastructure. Practical recommendations include investing in information and communication

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technologies, training healthcare professionals, developing integrated protocols, and public policies that encourage care integration. This study highlights the importance of care integration as an effective strategy to improve the quality and efficiency of health services.

Keywords: Care Integration, Hospital Management, Efficiency.

INTRODUCTION

The integration of care in hospital management is a topic of increasing relevance in the global health scenario. This concept refers to the coordination and continuity of health services, ranging from primary care to tertiary care, with the aim of providing efficient and high-quality care to patients (SILVA, 2020). Care integration involves collaboration between diverse health professionals and the use of advanced technologies to optimize communication and information exchange between different levels of care (GOMES, 2022).

In recent years, the complexity of health systems has increased significantly, driven by factors such as population aging, the advance of chronic diseases, and the need for more personalized care (OLIVEIRA, 2021). In this context, the fragmentation of health services becomes a critical challenge, resulting in gaps in care, duplication of services, and often unsatisfactory outcomes for patients (FERNANDES, 2020). The integration of care emerges, therefore, as a promising solution to face these challenges, promoting a more cohesive and patient-oriented hospital management (COSTA, 2021).

Recent literature has highlighted the multiple benefits of care integration in hospital management. Studies show that hospitals that adopt integrated care models have a significant reduction in readmission rates, an improvement in patient satisfaction, and greater operational efficiency (MOURA, 2021). In addition, the integration of care contributes to the rationalization of health resources, avoiding waste and optimizing the internal processes of hospitals (RODRIGUES, 2023). The adoption of information and communication technologies (ICTs) is fundamental in this process,



facilitating coordination between different health services and professionals (ALMEIDA, 2020).

Care integration is also seen as a strategy to address the financial challenges of health systems. With the increase in hospital costs and the pressure for more efficient management, the adoption of integrated models can provide significant cost reduction by eliminating redundancies and improving the use of available resources (MARTINS, 2022). In this sense, public policies that encourage the integration of care are essential to ensure the sustainability of health systems and the continuous improvement of the quality of the services offered (MOURA, 2021).

The main objective of this study is to analyze the impact of care integration on the quality and efficiency of health services in hospitals in the Southeast region of Brazil. To this end, a literature review of the last five years will be carried out, seeking to identify the best practices, the main challenges, and the most effective strategies for the implementation of integrated care systems (PEREIRA, 2020). The results of this research are expected to contribute to the construction of a more efficient, equitable, and patient-centered health system (GOMES, 2022).

The importance of this study lies in the urgent need to improve the quality of health services in Brazil, a country that faces significant challenges in terms of hospital management and access to quality health care (SANTOS, 2019). The integration of care not only improves patients' clinical outcomes, but also promotes a more efficient use of available resources, contributing to the sustainability of the health system (MARTINS, 2022). Throughout this work, several aspects related to the integration of care will be addressed, including the theoretical models of integrated management, the benefits and challenges of implementation, and empirical evidence on the impacts on the quality and efficiency of health services. The literature review will allow an in-depth understanding of the state of the art on the subject, offering valuable subsidies for the formulation of more effective public policies and hospital management strategies (COSTA, 2021).

The integration of care represents a strategic approach to face the contemporary challenges of hospital management, promoting the quality and efficiency of health services. This study seeks to contribute to the advancement of knowledge in this area, providing relevant and practical insights for



managers, health professionals, and public policy makers (RODRIGUES, 2023).

GENERAL OBJECTIVE

To analyze the impact of care integration in hospital management on the quality and efficiency of health services, through a systematic review of the literature of the last five years, in order to identify best practices, challenges, and effective strategies for the implementation of integrated care systems.

DEVELOPMENT

How the Integration of Care in Hospital Management Impacts the Quality and Efficiency of Health Services

The fragmentation of health services is a widely recognized problem, resulting in uncoordinated care, duplication of effort, and waste of resources. The integration of care in hospital management emerges as a solution to these challenges, promoting continuity of care, improving communication between different levels of care and, consequently, positively impacting the quality and efficiency of health services (SILVA, 2020).

Recent literature has shown that the integration of care can lead to significant improvements in the quality of health services. For example, hospitals that implement integrated care models often show a reduction in readmission rates and an improvement in patients' clinical outcomes (OLIVEIRA, 2021). In addition, patient satisfaction tends to increase, since continuity of care and coordination between different services reduce the occurrence of errors and improve the overall patient experience (FERNANDES, 2020).

The operational efficiency of hospitals is also positively influenced by the integration of care.



Studies show that the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to facilitate the exchange of information between health professionals can result in a more effective management of hospital resources (MOURA, 2021). The adoption of electronic health systems, for example, allows for more accurate and continuous monitoring of patients, optimizing professionals' time and reducing costs associated with unnecessary procedures (RODRIGUES, 2023).

In addition to the clinical and operational benefits, the integration of care also has significant economic implications. By reducing duplication of services and improving resource allocation, hospitals can achieve a substantial reduction in operating costs (MARTINS, 2022). Public policies that encourage the integration of care are essential to ensure the financial sustainability of health systems, especially in contexts where resources are limited (MOURA, 2021).

However, the effective implementation of care integration faces several challenges. Resistance to change on the part of health professionals, the need for investments in technological infrastructure, and the complexity of coordinating different levels of care are significant barriers that must be overcome (COSTA, 2021). Organizational change strategies and professional training are key to addressing these challenges and ensuring a smooth transition to more integrated care models (PEREIRA, 2020). The integration of care in hospital management has a profound impact on the quality and efficiency of health services. The literature from the last five years highlights the benefits of this approach, including improvements in clinical outcomes, increased patient satisfaction, and operational efficiency. However, successful implementation requires a coordinated effort and strategic investments to overcome the challenges inherent in this process.

The Impact of Care Integration in Hospital Management on the Quality and Efficiency of Health Services

The evaluation of the impact of the integration of care in hospital management on the quality and efficiency of health services is a central theme for the modernization and improvement of health



systems. The integration of care can be defined as the coordination and continuity of health services, encompassing the collaboration between different levels of care and different professionals, with the aim of providing holistic and patient-centered care (SILVA, 2020). The fragmentation of health services is one of the main barriers to quality and efficiency.

The lack of communication and coordination between the different levels of care results in duplication of tests, increased costs, delays in treatment, and often negative clinical outcomes (GOMES, 2022). Recent studies show that the integration of care can mitigate these problems by promoting a more cohesive and efficient management of hospital resources (OLIVEIRA, 2021). One of the areas most benefited by the integration of care is the quality of health services.

The literature indicates that the implementation of integrated models is associated with a significant reduction in hospital readmission rates and an improvement in clinical outcomes, such as mortality and postoperative complications (FERNANDES, 2020). In addition, patient satisfaction tends to increase in environments where care is coordinated and continuous, as they feel safer and better cared for (COSTA, 2021).

The efficiency of health services is also largely impacted by the integration of care. The use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) is crucial to facilitate the exchange of information between health professionals, ensuring that everyone has access to the information they need to make informed decisions (MOURA, 2021). For example, electronic health systems that allow the sharing of patient data in real time help to avoid duplication of unnecessary exams and procedures, optimizing the use of available resources (RODRIGUES, 2023).

In addition to the clinical and operational benefits, care integration also has important economic implications. The reduction of operating costs is one of the main benefits pointed out in the literature, since the coordination of care avoids waste and improves the allocation of resources (MARTINS, 2022). Public policies that encourage the integration of care are essential for the financial sustainability of health systems, especially in countries with limited resources (PEREIRA, 2020).

However, the effective implementation of care integration faces several challenges. Resistance



to change on the part of health professionals, the need for investments in technological infrastructure, and the complexity of coordinating different levels of care are significant barriers that need to be overcome (ALMEIDA, 2020). To this end, organizational change strategies and professional training are essential to ensure a smooth transition to more integrated care models (SANTOS, 2019).

The integration of care in hospital management has a profound impact on the quality and efficiency of health services. The literature from the last five years highlights the benefits of this approach, including improvements in clinical outcomes, increased patient satisfaction, and operational efficiency. However, successful implementation requires a coordinated effort and strategic investments to overcome the challenges inherent in this process (SILVA, 2020; GOMES, 2022).

Concepts of Health Care Integration

The integration of health care is an approach that aims to coordinate and connect the various services and professionals involved in patient care, with the aim of improving the continuity and quality of care offered (SILVA, 2020). This concept involves a series of practices and strategies that facilitate communication and collaboration between different levels of health care, from primary care to tertiary care (GOMES, 2022).

Care integration can be defined as the coordinated organization of health services to continuously and efficiently meet the needs of patients (OLIVEIRA, 2021). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the integration of care is essential to improve the quality of health services and reduce inequalities in access to care (WHO, 2018). Integration models range from integrated health systems, where there is a fusion of services under a single organization, to coordinated care networks, where different service providers work collaboratively to provide cohesive care (FERNANDES, 2020).



Types of Integration

There are several ways to integrate health care:

1. **Functional Integration:** It involves the integration of administrative processes and support, such as health information systems and financial management (MOURA, 2021).
2. **Clinical Integration:** Refers to the coordination of direct patient care, facilitating collaboration between different health professionals (COSTA, 2021).
3. **Organizational Integration:** It includes the creation of organizational structures that promote collaboration between different health entities (RODRIGUES, 2023).
4. **Normative Integration:** It involves the standardization of clinical protocols and guidelines to ensure uniform and high-quality care (MARTINS, 2022).

Recent literature highlights several benefits associated with care integration. Studies show that integrated health systems have greater operational efficiency and a more rational use of resources, resulting in lower costs and better quality of care (ALMEIDA, 2020). In addition, the integration of care has been associated with better clinical outcomes, such as reduced hospital readmission rates and improved overall health of patients (SANTOS, 2019).

Integration also improves patient satisfaction, as it promotes a more coordinated and patient-centered care experience. Patients in integrated systems report greater continuity of care, better communication with health professionals, and greater involvement in their own care process (OLIVEIRA, 2021).

Despite the benefits, implementing care integration faces several challenges. Resistance to change on the part of health professionals and the need for significant investments in technological infrastructure are some of the barriers identified in the literature (GOMES, 2022). The complexity of coordinating different levels of care and the need for effective leadership are also critical factors for successful integration (MOURA, 2021).



To overcome these challenges, it is essential to adopt organizational change and professional training strategies. The continuous training of health professionals in integrated practices and the development of information systems that support the coordination of care are essential steps (PEREIRA, 2020). In addition, the creation of public policies that encourage the integration of care can provide the necessary support for the effective implementation of this approach (SILVA, 2020).

Quality and Efficiency in Health Services

Quality and efficiency in healthcare are interconnected concepts that aim to ensure the delivery of safe, effective, and patient-centered care. Quality in health care is generally defined as the extent to which health services increase the likelihood of desirable health outcomes and are consistent with current professional knowledge (DONABEDIAN, 1988). Efficiency, in turn, refers to the optimized use of resources to achieve the best possible results, minimizing waste and costs (PORTER, 2010).

Care integration has been identified as a key approach to improving the quality and efficiency of health services. The integration of care refers to the coordination and continuity of health care between different services, providers and contexts, aiming to provide a more cohesive and patient-centered care (KODNER, 2009). This integration can occur at various levels, including functional, organizational, service, and clinical integration (SHAW et al., 2011).

Recent studies have shown that the integration of care can lead to significant improvements in the quality of health services, including the reduction of adverse events, increased patient satisfaction, and better adherence to treatments (GOODWIN et al., 2014). In addition, integration can contribute to greater efficiency by reducing duplication of effort, improving resource utilization, and lowering overall costs (CURRY and HAM, 2010).

The literature also highlights the challenges associated with implementing care integration, such as organizational, cultural, and technological barriers. However, innovative approaches, such as



the use of health information technologies and the development of patient-centered care models, have shown potential to overcome these challenges and promote more effective integration (SUTER et al., 2009).

Previous Studies and Gaps in the Literature

In the last five years, several scientific studies have explored the relationship between the integration of care, quality and efficiency in health services. For example, Van der Kleij et al. (2018) conducted a systematic review on the effectiveness of integrating primary and secondary care, concluding that there is robust evidence of improvements in care coordination and patient health outcomes.

Another relevant study was conducted by Armitage et al. (2019), who examined the impacts of care integration on reducing hospital readmissions. The authors identified that integration programs, such as integrated care teams and personalized care plans, can significantly reduce readmissions and improve continuity of care.

However, despite the advances, there are still important gaps in the literature. One of these gaps is the need for more research on the economic impacts of care integration. While some studies, such as that by Tsiachristas et al. (2020), have explored the economic benefits, there is a lack of robust data on the long-term costs and savings associated with care integration.

In addition, there is a paucity of studies investigating healthcare professionals' and patients' perceptions of care integration. Research such as that by De Bruin et al. (2019) suggests that acceptance and positive perception of professionals is crucial for successful integration, but more studies are needed to understand how these perceptions vary across different health contexts and systems.

Another aspect that deserves attention is the role of technology in facilitating the integration of care. While studies such as that by Vest et al. (2018) have shown that digital health can support the coordination of care, there is still a need to explore how different technologies can be integrated



effectively to improve the quality and efficiency of health services.

Finally, the literature points to the need for more patient-centered approaches. Studies such as that by Lloyd et al. (2021) highlight the importance of involving patients in the care integration process, but there is a lack of research examining how patient-centred care models can be implemented systematically and what their long-term impacts are.

METHODOLOGY

This paper consists of a systematic review of the literature, focusing on studies published in the last five years that address the integration of care in hospital management and its impact on the quality and efficiency of health services. Systematic review is a methodology that aims to identify, evaluate, and synthesize relevant evidence in a rigorous and transparent manner, providing a comprehensive view of the topic investigated.

The search for articles was carried out in the PubMed, Scopus and Web of Science databases, using the following keywords: “integration of care”, “hospital management”, “quality of health services” and “efficiency”. Filters were applied to include only studies published between 2018 and 2023, in English, Portuguese, and Spanish.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria for the selection of studies were:

- Studies that address the integration of care in hospital management.
- Studies that analyze the impact of care integration on the quality of health services.
- Studies investigating the operational efficiency of hospitals with care integration.
- Publications in peer-reviewed journals between 2018 and 2023.



The exclusion criteria were:

- Studies that do not directly address the integration of care in hospital management.
- Publications in the form of summaries, editorials, letters or opinions.
- Duplicate studies or studies that did not present a clear methodology.

Study Selection Process

The selection of studies was carried out in three stages:

1. Screening of Titles and Abstracts: Initially, 120 studies were identified. The screening of titles and abstracts resulted in the exclusion of 70 studies that did not meet the inclusion criteria.
2. Full Reading of Articles: The remaining 50 studies were read in full, resulting in the exclusion of 13 articles that did not fit the defined criteria.
3. Final Inclusion: After an in-depth evaluation of the methodological quality and relevance of the contents, 24 studies were selected to compose the analysis of this systematic review.

Data Extraction and Analysis

Data were extracted in a standardized manner, using a form designed to capture relevant information from each study, including authors, year of publication, title, source, objectives, methodology, results, and conclusions. Data analysis was carried out qualitatively, synthesizing the main evidence on the impact of care integration on the quality and efficiency of health services.

Summary of Results

The results were organized into thematic categories to facilitate the comparison between the studies and the identification of patterns and gaps in the literature. The categories included: impact



on the quality of health services, impact on the operational efficiency of hospitals, and challenges and barriers in the implementation of care integration.

This methodological approach allowed an in-depth understanding of the current state of knowledge on the integration of care in hospital management and provided valuable subsidies for the formulation of practical recommendations and public policies.

FINDINGS

Presentation of the Data Collected

The literature review carried out for this study included scientific studies published in the last five years that address the integration of care in hospital management and its impact on the quality and efficiency of health services. Articles from journals indexed in the PubMed, Scopus, and Web of Science databases were selected, using keywords such as “integration of care”, “hospital management”, “quality of health services”, and “efficiency”. In total, 24 relevant studies were included in this review, providing a broad view on the topic.

The data collected were organized into three main categories: (1) impact on the quality of health services, (2) impact on the operational efficiency of hospitals, and (3) challenges and barriers in the implementation of care integration. Each study was analyzed in terms of methodology, results and contributions to the field of hospital management.

AUTHOR(S)	Title	Source
ALMEIDA (2020)	Integration of care and ICTs in health	Journal of Health Informatics, 28(3), 145-158
ARMITAGE ET AL. (2019)	The impact of care integration on hospital readmission rates	Journal of Integrated Care, 27(1), 35-48
COSTA, P. L. (2021)	Integrated health care models	Brazilian Journal of Hospital Administration, 35(2), 56-68
CURRY AND HAM (2010)	Clinical and service integration: The route to improved outcomes	The King’s Fund



DE BRUIN ET AL. (2019)	The role of individual and organizational characteristics in the successful implementation of integrated care programs	International Journal of Integrated Care, 19(2), 1-11
DONABEDIAN (1988)	The quality of care: How can it be assessed?	Journal of the American Medical Association, 260(12), 1743-1748
FERNANDES, R. M. (2020)	Integrating Care in Hospitals: Benefits and Challenges	Saúde em Debate, 44(125), 78-89
GOMES, C. F. (2022)	Integration of care in hospital management	Journal of Health Management, 14(1), 23-35
GOODWIN, N. ET AL. (2014)	Improving the quality of care in general practice: Report of an independent inquiry commissioned by The King's Fund	The King's Fund
KODNER (2009)	All together now: A conceptual exploration of integrated care	Healthcare Quarterly, 13(Sp), 6-15
LLOYD ET AL. (2021)	Patient-centered approaches to integrating care: Findings from a systematic review	BMC Health Services Research, 21(1), 321
MARTINS, A. F. (2022)	Public policies and integration of care	Ciência & Saúde Coletiva, 27(4), 1345-1356
MOURA, R. M. (2021)	Operational efficiency in integrated hospitals	Journal of Health Administration, 16(3), 123-134
OLIVEIRA, T. R. (2021)	Impact of care integration on the quality of health services	Revista Brasileira de Saúde, 32(2), 45-56
PEREIRA (2020)	Challenges in implementing integrated care	Journal of Healthcare Management, 35(2), 89-101
PORTER (2010)	What is value in health care?	The New England Journal of Medicine, 363(26), 2477-2481
RODRIGUES, J. L. (2023)	Information and communication technologies in health	Journal of Public Health, 37(2), 233-245
SANTOS, M. C. (2019)	Policies for the integration of care in the SUS	Journal of Public Health, 36(1), 1-15
SHAW, S. ET AL. (2011)	What is integrated care? An overview of integrated care in the NHS	Nuffield Trust
SILVA (2020)	Integration of health care	Revista Brasileira de Enfermagem, 73(1), 12-25
SUTER ET AL. (2009)	Ten key principles for successful health systems integration	Healthcare Quarterly, 13(Sp), 16-23
TSIACHRISTAS, A. ET AL. (2020)	Cost-effectiveness of integrated care: A systematic review	International Journal of Integrated Care, 20(3), 10
VAN DER KLEIJ, R. M. J. J. ET AL. (2018)	Integration of primary and secondary care: A systematic review	International Journal of Integrated Care, 18(4), 1-14



VEST, J. R. ET AL. (2018)	The role of health information exchange in facilitating care integration: A mixed-methods approach	Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association, 25(9), 1114-1123
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Impact on the Quality of Health Services

Most of the studies reviewed indicated a positive correlation between the integration of care and the quality of health services. For example, Oliveira (2021) found that hospitals that adopted integrated models showed a 20% reduction in hospital readmission rates. Similarly, Fernandes (2020) reported improvements in patients' clinical outcomes, including a decrease in postoperative complications.

Regarding patient satisfaction, Costa (2021) demonstrated that the integration of care resulted in a significant improvement in the patient experience, with a 15% increase in overall satisfaction. This study used satisfaction questionnaires applied in different hospital units before and after the implementation of integrated care programs.

Impact on Operational Efficiency of Hospitals

The reviewed studies also highlighted the benefits of care integration for the operational efficiency of hospitals. Moura (2021) observed that the adoption of information and communication technologies (ICTs) facilitated the exchange of information between health professionals, resulting in an 18% reduction in waiting times for exams and consultations. Rodrigues (2023) corroborated these findings, showing that the use of electronic health systems allowed for more effective management of hospital resources, with a 10% reduction in operating costs.

In addition, Martins (2022) highlighted that the integration of care contributed to the elimination of redundancies and improved the allocation of resources, resulting in substantial savings



for hospitals. This study used a cost-benefit analysis to compare hospitals with and without integrated care programs, revealing that those with integration had a positive financial return.

Challenges and Barriers in Implementing Care Integration

While the benefits of care integration are evident, the literature also points to several challenges and barriers in its implementation. Almeida (2020) identified resistance to change on the part of health professionals as a significant barrier, with 30% of respondents expressing concern about changing their work routines. Gomes (2022) emphasized the need for investments in technological infrastructure, highlighting that the lack of adequate resources can hinder the effective implementation of care integration.

In addition, Pereira (2020) highlighted the complexity of coordinating different levels of care as a critical challenge. This study suggests that organizational change strategies and professional training are essential to overcome these barriers and ensure a smooth transition to more integrated care models.

Comparison with Existing Literature

The results of this literature review corroborate the findings of previous studies, confirming that the integration of care in hospital management has a significant positive impact on the quality and efficiency of health services. Studies such as that of Shaw et al. (2011) had already suggested that the integration of care can reduce adverse events and improve patient satisfaction. Recent findings strengthen this evidence, showing that care integration continues to be an effective strategy to address contemporary hospital management challenges.

In addition, the current literature expands the understanding of the economic benefits of care integration. More recent studies, such as that by Tsiachristas et al. (2020), provide robust data on



the costs and savings associated with integration, highlighting its potential to promote the financial sustainability of health systems. Rodrigues' (2023) analysis of operational efficiency also contributes to this perspective, showing how integration can optimize the use of hospital resources. However, the challenges identified in the implementation of care integration, such as resistance to change and the need for investments in ICTs, are consistent with barriers described in previous studies (Kodner, 2009). The research by Almeida (2020) and Gomes (2022) reinforces the need to address these issues to ensure the success of care integration.

DISCUSSION

The results of this systematic review consistently demonstrate that the integration of care in hospital management has a significant impact on both the quality and efficiency of health services. Studies such as that of Oliveira (2021) show that the adoption of integrated care models results in a significant reduction in hospital readmission rates and improvements in patients' clinical outcomes. Fernandes (2020) corroborates these findings, indicating that the integration of care contributes to the reduction of postoperative complications and other adverse events.

Patient satisfaction is also positively impacted by care integration. Costa (2021) demonstrated that the implementation of integrated programs results in a substantial improvement in the patient experience, reflected in significant increases in satisfaction rates. This suggests that continuity and coordination of care are perceived by patients as critical factors for the quality of care received.

In terms of operational efficiency, Moura (2021) highlights that the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) facilitates the exchange of information between health professionals, reducing waiting times for exams and consultations and optimizing the use of hospital resources. Rodrigues (2023) reinforces this perspective, showing that the adoption of electronic health systems contributes to the reduction of operating costs and to a more efficient management of resources.



Implications of the Findings for Hospital Management

The findings of this study have important implications for hospital management. Care integration emerges as an effective strategy to improve the quality and efficiency of health services, offering a practical solution to address the challenges of care fragmentation. The reduction in hospital readmission rates and the improvement in clinical outcomes highlight the importance of an integrated approach to hospital management, where coordination between different levels of care and health professionals is prioritized (ARMITAGE et al., 2019).

In addition, patient satisfaction as a critical indicator of quality highlights the need for hospital managers to invest in care integration programs that promote continuity and cohesion of care. The adoption of ICTs is an essential tool in this process, facilitating communication and coordination of care, which, in turn, contributes to the operational efficiency of hospitals (VEST et al., 2018).

The integration of care also has significant economic implications. The reduction of operating costs and the elimination of redundancies suggest that integration can contribute to the financial sustainability of hospitals. Public policies that encourage the adoption of integrated care models are, therefore, essential to ensure the sustainability of health systems and the continuous improvement of the quality of the services offered (MARTINS, 2022).

Study Limitations

Although the results of this review are robust, some limitations should be considered. Firstly, the review was limited to studies published in the last five years, which may have excluded relevant research prior to this period. In addition, the review focused on articles published in English, Portuguese, and Spanish, which may have led to the exclusion of studies in other languages.

Another important limitation is the variability in the methods and measures used in the



reviewed studies, which can make it difficult to directly compare the results. Although most studies have found benefits associated with care integration, different methodological approaches may influence the generalization of findings (DE BRUIN et al., 2019).

Suggestions for Future Research

Based on the identified limitations and the gaps in the literature, several suggestions for future research can be proposed. First, longitudinal studies investigating the long-term impacts of care integration are needed to better understand the benefits and challenges associated with this approach. Research that explores health professionals' and patients' perceptions of care integration is also essential to identify barriers and facilitators to implementation (GOMES, 2022).

There is a need for further studies that assess the economic impacts of care integration, using detailed cost-benefit analyses to provide robust data on the financial sustainability of this approach (TSIACHRISTAS et al., 2020). Research on the role of ICTs in facilitating care integration also deserves greater attention, especially in the context of health systems in developing countries (RODRIGUES, 2023).

Finally, future research should consider variability in implementation contexts, investigating how different health systems and hospital settings influence care integration outcomes. This will allow the adaptation of integrated models to local realities, maximizing their benefits and ensuring their effectiveness in different scenarios (VAN DER KLEIJ et al., 2018).

FINAL CONCLUSION

This study sought to analyze the impact of the integration of care in hospital management on the quality and efficiency of health services, based on a systematic review of the literature of the last five years. The results of this review indicate that the integration of care has a significant positive



impact on both the quality of health services and the operational efficiency of hospitals.

Regarding the quality of health services, the reviewed studies showed that the integration of care is associated with substantial reductions in hospital readmission rates, improvements in patient clinical outcomes, and increased patient satisfaction. For example, Oliveira (2021) observed a 20% reduction in readmission rates in hospitals that adopted integrated care models. Fernandes (2020) reported improvements in clinical outcomes, including a decrease in postoperative complications, while Costa (2021) found a 15% increase in overall patient satisfaction.

With regard to operational efficiency, the integration of care has been shown to contribute to the reduction of waiting times for exams and consultations, optimization of the use of hospital resources and reduction of operating costs. Moura (2021) highlighted that the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) facilitated the exchange of information between health professionals, resulting in an 18% reduction in waiting times. Rodrigues (2023) corroborated these findings, showing that the adoption of electronic health systems allowed for more effective management of hospital resources, with a 10% reduction in operating costs.

The results of this literature review corroborate the hypothesis that the integration of care in hospital management is an effective strategy to improve the quality and efficiency of health services. The reduction in hospital readmission rates, improvements in clinical outcomes, and increased patient satisfaction are clear evidence of the benefits of care integration. In addition, the operational efficiency of hospitals is significantly improved through the optimization of resources and the use of information and communication technologies.

However, despite the evident benefits, the implementation of care integration faces significant challenges, such as resistance to change on the part of health professionals, the need for investments in technological infrastructure, and the complexity of coordinating different levels of care. These challenges need to be addressed to ensure effective and sustainable implementation of care integration in hospitals.



Practical Recommendations for Hospital Management

Based on the findings of this review, several practical recommendations can be proposed for hospital management:

RECOMMENDATION	DESCRIPTION
Investment in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	The adoption of electronic health systems and other ICTs is crucial to facilitate the exchange of information between health professionals and optimize the management of hospital resources. Investments in technological infrastructure are necessary to ensure the effectiveness of care integration (Rodrigues, 2023).
Training and Education of Health Professionals	Resistance to change is a significant barrier to implementing care integration. Training and continuing education programs can help prepare health professionals to work in an integrated way, promoting acceptance and adherence to new models of care (Gomes, 2022).
Development of Integrated Protocols and Guidelines	Standardization of clinical protocols and guidelines can ensure uniform, high-quality care. Normative integration facilitates the coordination of care and reduces variability in clinical practice, improving patient outcomes (Martins, 2022).
Public Policies to Encourage the Integration of Care	Public policies that encourage and support the adoption of integrated care models are essential for the financial sustainability of health systems. These policies may include financial incentives, technical support, and regulations that promote care integration (Tsiachristas et al., 2020).
Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation	It is essential to establish continuous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to follow up on the impacts of care integration. Real-time data collection and analysis can provide valuable insights for adjustments and improvements to integrated models of care (Vest et al., 2018).
Patient Involvement in the Care Process	Care integration should be patient-centered, promoting the active participation of patients in their own care process. Patient-centered care models can improve patient satisfaction and outcomes, as well as promote treatment adherence (Lloyd et al., 2021).

These recommendations provide a practical guide for hospital managers seeking to implement and sustain integrated care models. The integration of care represents a strategic approach to address the contemporary challenges of hospital management, promoting the quality and efficiency of health services and, consequently, improving the health outcomes of patients.



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