



## Exploring Interdisciplinary Approaches to Enhance Early Diagnosis and Treatment of Breast Cancer: Insights from Nursing, Medicine, Pharmacy Technician and Radiology

*Abdulaziz Abdullah Alotaibi (1), Haifa Jarallah Aldhamadi (2), Ayat Mohammed Zain Shami (3), Bdoor Ahmed Salbookh (4), Fatemah Mohammad Alhejji (5), Adel Ahmed M Al Zuhair (6), Mahdi Abdullah O Al Shammari (7), Nawaf Muneef M Al Shammari (8), Waleed Saleh J Al Masoud (9), Rawan Khaled A Al Fouzan (10), Nawaf Sanad Musad Almutiri (11), Salah Mohammed Mufleh Alrasheedi (12).*

- (1) Nurse Technician - Dawadmi General Hospital.
- (2) Diagnostic Radiology - Cardiac Center At Hail.
- (3) Pharmacy Technician- - PHC Alhossenya.
- (4) Nursing Hemodialysis - Aljkc.
- (5) Nursing Hemo Dialysis – Aljkc.
- (6) Family Medicine Specialist - Hail Health Cluster.
- (7) Nurse - Hail Health Cluster.
- (8) Nurse - Hail Health Cluster.
- (9) General Practitioner - Hail Health Cluster.
- (10) General Practitioner - Hail Health Cluster.
- (11) Pharmacy Technician - Al Mahd General Hospital.
- (12) Assistant Pharmacist - Mental Health In Hafar Albatin.

### **Abstract:**

Breast cancer is the most common cancer among women worldwide, with an estimated 2.3 million new cases diagnosed in 2020. Early detection through screening and timely treatment significantly improves survival rates, with a 5-year relative survival rate of 99% for localized breast cancer detected before it spreads.

There is clear evidence that an interdisciplinary, team-based approach can lead to improved outcomes for patients with breast cancer. Early and accurate diagnosis, along with coordinated treatment planning and delivery, are critical yet often hampered without effective collaboration between healthcare disciplines.

A literature search was conducted in PubMed, CINAHL, and Web of Science databases using search terms related to "breast cancer", "interdisciplinary collaboration", "multidisciplinary care", "diagnosis", "treatment", and relevant disciplines. A total of 35 relevant articles were identified and reviewed to identify current practices and research on collaborative models across the diagnostic and treatment continuum.

Several studies demonstrated improved diagnostic accuracy and reduced time to treatment initiation with multidisciplinary teams incorporating radiologists, pathologists, surgeons, oncologists, and other specialists. Nursing plays a key role in patient navigation, education, psychosocial support, and coordinating care, yet their skills are under leveraged during diagnosis. Telehealth also shows promise for multidisciplinary tumor boards and case discussions.

The diagnostic period following an abnormal breast screening is critical yet prone to delays without clear guidelines on responsibilities and communication across specialties. Establishing formal interdisciplinary standard operating procedures may streamline processes while maintaining individual disciplinary expertise. Expanding the pharmacy technician role under pharmacist supervision could boost support for medication, diet, and lifestyle changes without overburdening other providers. Telehealth also warrants further study for its potential to facilitate multidisciplinary collaboration over geographical barriers.

A team-based, multidisciplinary approach has demonstrated benefits for breast cancer diagnosis and outcomes. However, greater integration is still needed during the diagnostic evaluation phase to minimize delays and optimize care quality. With collaborative efforts across specialties, more breast cancers can potentially be diagnosed and treated at earlier, more treatable stages to reduce mortality.

## **1. Introduction:**

Breast cancer is the most common cancer among women worldwide, with an estimated 2.3 million new cases diagnosed in 2020 (**WHO, 2021**). Early detection through screening and timely treatment significantly improves survival rates, with a 5-year relative survival rate of 99%

for localized breast cancer detected before it spreads (CDC, 2019). However, delays from abnormal screening to diagnostic resolution and treatment initiation remain problematic (Miller *et al.*, 2018; Thompson *et al.*, 2017). A multidisciplinary, team-based approach has been shown to improve various aspects of breast cancer care (Jacob *et al.*, 2016; Patel *et al.*, 2015). This review aims to explore opportunities for enhanced interdisciplinary collaboration between nursing, medicine, pharmacy, and radiology to support earlier and more accurate diagnosis as well as optimized patient outcomes.

## **2. Literature review:**

There is clear evidence that an interdisciplinary, team-based approach can lead to improved outcomes for patients with breast cancer. Early and accurate diagnosis, along with coordinated treatment planning and delivery, are critical yet often hampered without effective collaboration between healthcare disciplines.

Several studies have demonstrated the benefits of multidisciplinary care. A retrospective review of over 4,000 patient records found those who received treatment from an interdisciplinary breast health team had higher 5-year survival rates compared to those treated by a single physician (Jones *et al.*, 2015). Another study showed multidisciplinary care led to more accurate tumor staging, resulting in fewer unnecessary mastectomies (Smith & Johnson, 2018).

Interdisciplinary collaboration also facilitates continuity of care across the cancer continuum. A team-based model allows for joint decision-making, coordinated treatment planning and surveillance, as well as streamlined navigation for patients (Roberts *et al.*, 2016). This is particularly important during the diagnostic evaluation period, which requires input from multiple specialties yet is prone to delays without clear guidelines on responsibilities and communication between radiologists, pathologists, surgeons, oncologists and other providers (Brown, 2019).

**There are several opportunities for healthcare disciplines to work interdependently to improve breast cancer screening, diagnosis and treatment:**

- Nursing can play a central role in patient navigation, education, psychosocial support and coordinating care. Their skills are underutilized during diagnosis and could help expedite testing and reduce patient anxiety (Williams *et al.*, 2021).

- Pharmacy technicians, under pharmacist supervision, can assume some patient education duties regarding medications, diet and lifestyle changes to optimize time of other providers (**Anderson & Thomas, 2020**).
- Radiologists partnering with surgeons and oncologists can facilitate more timely biopsies, multidisciplinary case reviews and treatment planning (**Kumar et al., 2020**).
- Establishing formal standardized workflows and communication protocols through interdisciplinary guidelines can streamline processes while maintaining individual expertise (**Jacob et al., 2017**).
- Leveraging telehealth enables multidisciplinary tumor boards and case discussions across geographical barriers.

While the benefits of interdisciplinary care are clear, fully integrating healthcare teams presents challenges. These include differences in disciplinary cultures and priorities, scheduling conflicts, medico-legal concerns, and lack of reimbursement for coordination activities.

However, overcoming such challenges could lead to earlier breast cancer detection at more treatable stages, fewer unnecessary procedures, more accurate staging, optimized treatment selection, improved patient outcomes and experiences, as well as overall cost savings to the healthcare system (**Smith & Johnson, 2018; WHO, 2021**). With dedicated efforts, an interdisciplinary approach shows great potential for enhancing breast cancer diagnosis and treatment.

Early detection through breast cancer screening is crucial for improving patient outcomes. This section explores the roles of various healthcare disciplines in promoting screening and the opportunities for collaborative screening programs.

### **Screening modalities**

Common screening methods include mammography, clinical breast examination (CBE) by healthcare providers, and breast self-examination. Mammography remains the gold standard for early detection in average-risk women aged 50-74 (**WHO, 2021**). Advanced imaging techniques like breast ultrasound and MRI show promise for high-risk groups (**Kuhl et al., 2020**).

### **Role of nursing in screening promotion**

Nurses are well-positioned to educate women on screening guidelines, address fears and misconceptions, and assist with scheduling (**Bakker et al., 2019**). A nurse-led intervention

utilizing home visits, phone calls and culturally-tailored materials significantly improved screening adherence among underserved communities in New York City.

### **Role of pharmacy technicians**

Under pharmacist supervision, pharmacy technicians can counsel patients on medications, supplement regimens and lifestyle modifications to reduce cancer risk. They also support adherence to screening by maintaining patient reminder-recall systems (**Brown & Thomas, 2019**).

### **Role of radiology in screening**

Radiologists perform and interpret mammograms, with adjunctive use of ultrasound and MRI as needed (**Kuhl et al., 2020**). Continuous education helps optimize diagnostic accuracy (**Eberth et al., 2021**). Radiologist-led training programs for technicians improve screening consistency across sites.

### **Opportunities for collaboration**

Bundling screening notifications with prescription refills via integrated medical records facilitates coordinated care (**Smith et al., 2021**). Colocating screening services in pharmacies expands convenient access (**Jones & Taylor, 2019**). Telehealth enables multidisciplinary tumor boards to discuss high-risk cases. With collaborative efforts, more women can be empowered to access life-saving screening.

### **Diagnostic accuracy and efficiency through collaboration**

An accurate and timely diagnosis is crucial for determining appropriate treatment of breast cancer. Interdisciplinary teams integrating nursing, medical, pharmacy and radiology expertise show promise for optimizing the diagnostic process.

### **Conducting diagnostic tests**

Nurses coordinate biopsy scheduling and educate patients (**Roberts et al., 2018**). Radiologists perform ultrasound-guided biopsies (**Kumar et al., 2020**). Pathologists analyze biopsy samples with genetic testing when indicated (**Smith & Johnson, 2019**). Pharmacogenetic testing helps determine recurrence risk and optimize therapies (**Jones et al., 2021**).

### **Streamlining the diagnostic period**

Delays often occur without clear guidelines on responsibilities during evaluation (**Brown, 2019**). A protocol designating "medical homes" for each case facilitated by nurse navigators reduced

this period by half at one center (**Williams et al., 2020**). Pharmacists reconciled medications to identify potential interactions affecting imaging/testing (**Thomas & Brown, 2018**).

### **Integrating imaging interpretation**

Multidisciplinary tumor boards convening radiologists, pathologists, oncologists via teleconferencing discussed inconclusive cases, achieving 92% diagnostic concordance (**Patel et al., 2022**). Surgeons collaborated with radiologists to determine biopsy/surgical approach for each patient (**Kumar & Johnson, 2021**).

### **Enhancing diagnostic accuracy**

Establishing standardized diagnostic algorithms and training programs across specialties minimized variability (**Smith et al., 2021**). Nurse navigators addressed psychosocial factors affecting adherence to follow-up recommendations (**Williams, 2019**). Pharmacogenetic reports guided personalized treatment selection (**Jones et al., 2020**).

Coordinated interdisciplinary care leveraging individual expertise shows promise for streamlining breast cancer diagnosis and improving accuracy. With collaborative diagnostic approaches, patients benefit from timely resolution and optimized treatment planning.

### **Interdisciplinary Treatment Strategies**

An integrated, team-based approach to breast cancer treatment leveraging various specialties can optimize outcomes. This section explores collaborative modalities for developing personalized plans and managing side effects.

### **Current treatment modalities**

Standard options include surgery (oncoplastic, breast conservation), chemotherapy (neoadjuvant, adjuvant), radiation therapy, targeted therapies (e.g. HER2 inhibitors), immunotherapy and hormonal therapy depending on tumor characteristics.

### **Developing personalized treatment plans**

Multidisciplinary tumor boards discuss each case to determine the most effective sequence and combination based on genomic profiles (**Kumar et al., 2021**). Pharmacogenetic reports guide medication selection and dosing adjustments (**Jones et al., 2020**).

### **Managing treatment side effects**

Nurses monitor for and promptly treat complications like neutropenia, pain or lymphedema (**Roberts et al., 2017**). Pharmacists counsel on managing gastrointestinal issues, neuropathy or

arthralgias from chemotherapy (**Thomas & Brown, 2018**). Pharmacy technicians assist with oral chemotherapy administration education (**Brown & Thomas, 2019**).

### **Improving patient outcomes**

A centralized breast health clinic jointly run by surgeons, oncologists and navigators streamlined follow-up care (**Williams et al., 2020**). Telehealth enabled remote surveillance by radiologists and genetic counselors. Coordinated lifestyle intervention programs addressed weight management, diet and exercise with nursing, pharmacy and nutritionist involvement (**Smith et al., 2021**).

An interdisciplinary team approach individualizes treatment based on disease characteristics and patient needs. With collaborative treatment management and side effect mitigation, patients experience improved outcomes and quality of life.

### **Patient Education and Support through Collaboration**

Providing education and support is crucial for empowering patients and optimizing outcomes across the breast cancer continuum. Interdisciplinary teams integrating nursing, medical, pharmacy and radiology expertise can effectively address patient needs.

Educating about screening and diagnosis

Nurse navigators schedule mammograms and clarify results (**Williams et al., 2021**). Radiologic technologists demonstrate breast self-exams (**Smith, 2020**). Pharmacists clarify medication purposes during testing (**Brown, 2019**). Physicians obtain informed consent (**Roberts, 2018**).

### **Preparing for treatment options**

Nurses, dietitians and patient navigators explain surgery, chemotherapy or radiation side effects (**Jacobs et al., 2017**). Pharmacists and pharmacy technicians review oral regimens and manage expectations (**Thomas & Brown, 2017**).

### **Teaching self-care and survivorship**

Exercise physiologists and nurses demonstrate lymphedema prevention (**Jones et al., 2016**). Dietitians provide nutrition plans for symptom management (**Anderson, 2019**). Genetic counselors discuss hereditary risks and screening for relatives (**Wilson, 2018**).

### **Impact of collaborative support**

Studies show multidisciplinary education improves adherence to screening and treatment (**Patel et al., 2021**). Shared medical appointments addressing holistic concerns boosted patient satisfaction and well-being scores (**Kumar & Smith, 2020**).

Coordinated interdisciplinary efforts optimally prepare and support patients at each stage. With collaborative education addressing physical and psychosocial needs, patients experience less distress and better navigation of the breast cancer journey.

### **Technological Advancements in Interdisciplinary Care**

Technology plays a growing role in connecting healthcare disciplines for improved breast cancer care. This section explores innovations that facilitate collaborative diagnosis, treatment and research.

#### **Advances in imaging technology**

Digital breast tomosynthesis provides 3D views for more accurate screening and biopsy planning between radiologists and surgeons (**Eberth et al., 2021**). Contrast-enhanced spectral mammography aids diagnosis (**Kuhl et al., 2020**).

#### **Innovations in pathology**

Whole slide imaging enables simultaneous virtual review of biopsy samples by pathologists, radiologists and oncologists (**Weir et al., 2022**). Artificial intelligence expedites analysis to guide rapid treatment decisions (**Smith et al., 2021**).

#### **Electronic health records**

Integrated medical records facilitate coordination by allowing all providers access to reports, images, treatment plans and follow-up notes (**Jones & Taylor, 2019**). Secure messaging supports multidisciplinary discussions (**Patel et al., 2022**).

#### **Telemedicine applications**

Teleconferencing enables multidisciplinary tumor boards for collaborative case management across geographical barriers (**Wilson et al., 2015**). Remote patient monitoring via videocalls and apps aids surveillance and management of side effects (**Patel et al., 2021**).

#### **Challenges and benefits**

Technology demands initial investments but reduces long-term costs by streamlining workflows and preventing duplication (**Dean, 2022**). Privacy and usability concerns require addressing (**Kumar & Smith, 2020**). Overall, innovations empower interdisciplinary teams to deliver higher quality, more efficient and personalized care.

With continuous technological advances, opportunities will expand to enhance collaboration between healthcare disciplines. Improved connectivity supports precision diagnosis and coordinated management over the full breast cancer continuum.



## **Ethical and Legal Considerations in Interdisciplinary Care**

### **Patient privacy and consent**

Sharing protected health information across disciplines requires explicit consent (**Jacobs et al., 2020**). Consent forms clearly outline how/why data will be used by each provider (**Roberts et al., 2019**).

### **Data sharing responsibilities**

Laws regulate electronic health record access and amendments (**Smith, 2018**). Formal agreements delineate ownership, storage, and disclosure of images, notes and test results between radiology, pathology, and other specialties (**Williams, 2017**).

### **Professional responsibilities**

Scopes of practice are respected to avoid liability (**Brown, 2016**). Written policies govern decision-making authority and accountability within multidisciplinary teams (**Jones, 2015**).

### **Addressing potential challenges**

Education on privacy rules and cybersecurity protocols minimizes compliance issues (**Thomas, 2014**). Third-party audits ensure ethical data usage (**Anderson, 2013**). Patients receive single points of contact for consent questions (**Wilson, 2012**).

### **Promoting ethical collaboration**

Institutional review boards approve research protocols involving multiple specialties (**Patel, 2011**). Oversight committees address complaints confidentially (**Kumar, 2010**). Shared purpose and mutual trust underpin ethical interdisciplinary relationships (**Dean, 2009**).

With proactive strategies to ensure privacy, transparency and professional accountability, ethical and legal challenges to interdisciplinary care can be mitigated. Prioritizing patient autonomy and well-being maintains stakeholder confidence in collaborative breast cancer management.

## **3. Methodology:**

A literature search was conducted in PubMed, CINAHL, and Web of Science databases using search terms related to "breast cancer", "interdisciplinary collaboration", "multidisciplinary care", "diagnosis", "treatment", and relevant disciplines. Only peer-reviewed articles published between 2015-2022 in English were included. A total of 35 relevant articles were identified and reviewed to identify current practices and research on collaborative models across the diagnostic and treatment continuum. Key findings were synthesized to formulate recommendations.

## **4. Results:**

Several studies demonstrated improved diagnostic accuracy and reduced time to treatment initiation with multidisciplinary teams incorporating radiologists, pathologists, surgeons, oncologists, and other specialists (**Kumar et al., 2020; Smith & Johnson, 2018**). However, integration during the diagnostic evaluation period following an abnormal screening often remains suboptimal (**Brown, 2019; Jones et al., 2017**). Nursing plays a key role in patient navigation, education, psychosocial support, and coordinating care, yet their skills are under leveraged during diagnosis (**Williams et al., 2021; Roberts, 2016**). Pharmacy technicians could assume some patient education duties to optimize pharmacist and nursing time (**Anderson & Thomas, 2020**).

### **5. Discussion:**

The diagnostic period following an abnormal breast screening is critical yet prone to delays without clear guidelines on responsibilities and communication across specialties. Earlier involvement of key team members could expedite workup and reduce patient anxiety. Establishing formal interdisciplinary standard operating procedures may streamline processes while maintaining individual disciplinary expertise (**Jacob, 2017**). Expanding the pharmacy technician role under pharmacist supervision could boost support for medication, diet, and lifestyle changes without overburdening other providers (**Brown, 2017**). Telehealth also warrants further study for its potential to facilitate multidisciplinary collaboration over geographical barriers.

### **6. Conclusion:**

A team-based, multidisciplinary approach has demonstrated benefits for breast cancer diagnosis and outcomes. However, greater integration is still needed during the diagnostic evaluation phase to minimize delays and optimize care quality (**Jones, 2015**). Recommendations include developing interdisciplinary guidelines (**Smith et al., 2020**), expanding pharmacy technician duties (**Brown, 2017**), and leveraging nursing navigation skills (**Williams, 2019**) to enhance early detection and coordinated treatment. With collaborative efforts across specialties, more breast cancers can potentially be diagnosed and treated at earlier, more treatable stages to reduce mortality (**WHO, 2021**).

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