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"It's like a pit stop." A Qualitative Study Exploring Patient Experiences in Interdisciplinary Teams-Based Care for Rheumatic and Musculoskeletal Diseases.

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Objective: Given the rising prevalence and management complexity of rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases (RMDs), evidence-informed solutions are needed to provide high-quality care within the available workforce. Interdisciplinary team-based models of rheumatology care, defined as a rheumatologist and one or more interdisciplinary health professionals (e.g., physical therapists, occupational therapists, nurses) working collaboratively to deliver care, provide a promising solution, however there is limited understanding of patients' experiences with this approach. We aimed to 1) explore the experiences of RMD patients receiving interdisciplinary team-based care, and 2) understand patient's perceptions of how team-based care impacts their rheumatic disease management.

Methods: Informed by qualitative description, this study was a secondary analysis of qualitative interviews collected as part of an implementation science case study of the Center for Arthritis Research Excellence (CArE), an interdisciplinary rheumatology care model in Newmarket, Ontario, Canada. Participants were purposively sampled for diversity in age, disease duration, gender, and geographic location. Interviews, lasting 45-60 minutes, included questions pertaining to patients' experiences with team-based care and perceptions of impact on disease management. We inductively coded these transcripts using content analysis.

Results: Fifteen participants were interviewed, 47% identified as female, and 66% had inflammatory arthritis. We constructed two overarching themes: 1) *Improved Access to Care* and 2) *Comprehensive Care*. Participants described how an interdisciplinary rheumatology team resulted in improved access to diverse healthcare expertise, enhancing overall care efficiency. Team-based care led to quicker responses from interdisciplinary providers compared to traditional practices, according to participants. They perceived that a team-based model resulted in a holistic approach to care, addressing needs beyond what rheumatologists alone could offer. Extended consultations facilitated in-depth assessments, education, and support across all aspects of disease management. Patients appreciated the integrated "one-stop-shop" model, which minimized external referrals and reduced the number of appointments. The interdisciplinary approach fostered patient engagement, self-advocacy, and shared decision-making. However, some participants with non-inflammatory conditions felt their needs might fall outside the scope for full benefits from a team-based care model.

Conclusions: This study highlights RMD patients' experiences receiving care within an interdisciplinary team-based model of rheumatology care. A team-based approach was valued by patients for improving care access and providing comprehensive management through complimentary expertise, resulting in greater efficiency and holistic management of their RMDs. These results advocate for the increased use of interdisciplinary team-based models in

rheumatology care. Future studies should explore patient experiences with team-based care across different sites and team structures.

Table 1. Themes and subthemes with illustrative quotes.

Theme, subtheme	**Illustrative quotes**
Theme: Improved Access to Care	
Timely Access to Care	*"They considered me in their triaging process to be a more urgent case. I was in with Dr X within two weeks. That's how it started out at that clinic." (P25-KH)* *"Got into care with – now I've forgotten her name – but the occupational therapist; had a meeting on – for about an hour on the triage. And then she was able to move some things around and get me in the next day" (P7-PH)*
Team Responsiveness to Patient Inquiries	*"They're always available for questions. I can pop them an email anytime and they are available. They get right back to me, or they give me a call and we discuss what's going on. They're very knowledgeable about the disease. I don't have to feel like I need to wait until my next appointment with the doctor if I want to speak about something I'm having a concern with. I can drop the physio and email or drop the pharmacist an email and they'll get right back to me. That's amazing." (P25-KH)* *And because I'm on an immunosuppressant drug, I guess by definition I wasn't sure – and this was, like, beyond just kind of the regular, like, flu. So, I wasn't sure, like, should I skip a dose? And so, I was curious, so I actually phoned – when you phone the office, you can, I guess, like, one of the options is, like, "Press 2 for pharmacy." So I left a message for the two pharmacists there. Just kind of a quick voice, "Hey, this is my*

	dilemma or my question, and I would appreciate if you could weigh in." And they gave me a call back. Like it's not a call back necessarily [in? 00:20:46] two hours, but within two days I get that phone call back. (P14-TC)
Theme: Comprehensive Care	
Diverse Expertise	*"What I could expect. It was all three healthcare professionals there together. If I had a question, whoever was best to answer the question was there to answer it. That was very reassuring as well and you just feel like, you feel confident in the care because they're experts in this specific area. They are all experts in their own specialty. Whether it's the drugs, the medical side, or the physio side, they know the rheumatic diseases so well and they are such specialists in their own area that it makes you feel very confident about the care that you're receiving. I didn't feel hesitant because they made me feel confident about going forward with that plan of care" (P25-KH)* *Having the access to different members of the healthcare team that would be something that you would for sure replicate. Doctors are great but they are limited. They are limited in their time. They are limited in their scope of practice. They are limited in their knowledge. A doctor can't be an expert on everything and so many diseases have so many different aspects to them. It's not just about bloodwork and medication. It's about the whole body and the comprehensive care and there might be a dietician to look at your eating plan. It might be a physio like we have at the arthritis clinic to tailor a specific physio plan. The pharmacists are so key because they can go more in depth about the medication, you're on and speak to you about side effects and that kind of thing. (P25-KH)*
In-depth consultation	*"It's just kind of the time they spent, and the fact – it also feels good because you feel like you have a whole team of people working for you. Instead of just going to see one doctor, which could feel, like, transactional sometimes. And – so I think, yes, having that component of helping these patients, whatever, you know, I guess field you want to – or discipline of medicine you want to insert it in, would be, like helping provide a lot of support with just a, you know, "This is what you're going through,"(P14-TC)* *"It was a physiotherapist who was very experienced with rheumatic disease, with all types of arthritis and she went*

	quite in depth in terms of my history and all of the issues surrounding the initial diagnosis. Or it wasn't even a diagnosis at that point, the issues surrounding my symptoms It was quite in depth before I even saw the doctor. I thought that was great as well"(P25-KH)
Integrated "one-stop shop" model	*"Everybody's working together for the right purpose. Get this person back up and running. It's like pit stop. You don't want to take all day in that pit stop; you want to get that thing in and out and on back on the road again so it can win the race." (P18-BC)* *They might be able to do this sort of team-based care, but you'd have to refer to a physio at this building and a dietician at that building and a pharmacist at this building. To have everybody in the same office is so value because when you're unhealthy if you have a disease or you're sick it is very difficult to even get to an appointment sometimes like I initially mentioned. Different diseases have different issues so every disease has its own issue, but it's still when you're not healthy it can be very difficult to go to several appointments. Having all those different professionals under one roof, that I would replicate for sure. That's amazing. (P25-KH)*