Health Professionals Experiences of Integrated Care Pathways (2008)

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Background
In striving to deliver high quality healthcare, the concept of Integrated Care Pathways (ICPs) has proven to be an effective tool, presenting a continuous quality improvement method aimed at optimising patient outcomes and maximising clinical efficiency. There has been much written about care pathways in recent literature however there is a lack of knowledge about healthcare professionals’ experiences of these pathways in Ireland.

Aim
To explore the experiences of healthcare professionals working with ICPs, to obtain their views of the strengths and weaknesses of this patient management method.

Method
This study used a phenomenological research approach. It explored the lived experience of staff involved in Integrated Care Pathways in two acute hospitals in Ireland and data was collected using semi-structured interviews.

Results
Themes identified in the data which demonstrated the requirements for the successful working of ICPs included the need for multidisciplinary buy-in, the importance of effective communication and the role of the service-user with ICPs. An additional theme demonstrated the importance of audit in ascertaining the value of using these pathways.

Conclusions
The results of this study can be used to inform the development and use of ICPs. Examining ICPs from the point of view of health-professionals working with this method of patient management helps to determine possible problems that may arise in the development and use of pathways and the benefits of using this approach.