

**A Grounded Theory Study of Patients' and Families'
Experiences of Receiving Care on Accountable Care Units**

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Abstract

International healthcare organizations and institutions are redesigning care delivery systems to improve efficiency and patient outcomes. One model rapidly gaining popularity is the Accountable Care Unit (ACU), an innovative approach to healthcare delivery that converts traditional hospital wards into managed microsystems and includes a central focus on interdisciplinary collaboration. The Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) adopted ACU and reported favorable outcomes. However, to date, no study explored patients' experiences of receiving care in ACUs. Previous studies have relied primarily on quantitative evidence measuring various health outcomes in ACUs. A constructivist grounded theory methodology will be used to explore patients' and their family members' experiences receiving care on ACUs. Specifically, the objectives are (1) to describe and define how care is experienced on ACUs from the perspective of patients and their family members, (2) to develop an interpretive understanding of the specific social processes of this care model as experienced by patients and family members, and (3) to construct a substantive theory that will serve as a framework for improving care for future recipients of care in ACUs. The study will use purposeful theoretical sampling of patients and their family members who are admitted to ACUs. Data collection will involve in-depth interviews using a semi-structured interview guide, and participants will also be requested to complete a reflective journaling activity about their experiences of care in ACUs. The interviews and journals will be transcribed verbatim and will undergo comparative analysis until data saturation is reached. The substantive theory that will emerge from the findings will serve as a framework to further enhance ACUs' healthcare service delivery. On a broader scale, we hope that this research will also advance the existing foundation of knowledge surrounding care delivery in ACU settings and support a more patient- and family-centred healthcare system.