



# A Chain as Strong as Its Weakest Link: Staff Experiences of Collaboration in a Specialized Care Pathway for Adolescent Anorexia Nervosa

Selma Arnautalic, Clinician, Region Örebro län, Faculty of medicine and health

Sanna Aila Gustafsson, affiliate associate professor at the institute of behavioral, social and legal sciences, Örebro University

**Introduction:** Anorexia Nervosa (AN) is a severe psychiatric disorder with one of the highest mortality rates among mental illnesses. In Sweden, the need for inpatient care among children and adolescents with AN has increased since 2021, challenging communication and coordination between inpatient and outpatient care staff. To strengthen collaboration and continuity of care, one regional eating disorder clinic established weekly inter-unit coordination meetings and a new day-treatment program integrating treatment as usual with meal practice and interventions based on Dialectical Behavioral Therapy principles.

**Aims:** To explore how staff members within specialized outpatient, day, and inpatient care experience collaboration within an integrated care chain for patients with AN.

**Methods:** Semi-structured interviews with staff across care levels were conducted and thematically analyzed. Four themes emerged and were presented at staff validation meetings, ensuring credibility and consensus regarding the results of this study.

**Results:** The four themes that emerged were the following: “Model for collaboration” - where participants described how weekly coordination meetings provided a structured and efficient forum enhancing transparency and reducing misunderstandings; “Respect and knowledge of the roles and mandates” - which described how mutual understanding of each unit’s mission fostered trust, though differing time perspectives sometimes created tension; “Building a coherent pathway” - describing how staff emphasized the value of continuity and the day care’s role as a vital bridge between inpatient and outpatient settings; “Collaboration as an ongoing process” - where sustained teamwork was described to require time and communication, participants also emphasized the importance of shared learning.

**Discussion:** Structured weekly meetings strengthened transparency, trust and continuity, especially through the day care’s bridging role. However, collaboration requires continuous investment regarding time and shared knowledge.