

Interview Guide: Exploring the Lived Experience of Patients with Chronic Fracture-Related Infection (FRI)

Study Title: A Qualitative Study to Reveal the Devastating Impacts of Chronic Fracture-Related Infection

Interviewer Instructions:

This is a semi-structured interview guide based on a disease burden framework (encompassing physical, psychological, social, and economic dimensions). The guide provides a flexible structure with core open-ended questions and suggested probing prompts. The interviewer should:

- (1) Use the core questions to initiate discussion in each domain.
- (2) Actively listen and use the prompts (or generate new ones) to explore participants' responses in greater depth, following their lead.
- (3) Maintain a neutral, empathetic, and non-judgmental stance.
- (4) Allow the conversation to flow naturally while ensuring all key domains are covered.
- (5) The interview should be conducted in a private, comfortable setting.

Part A: Introduction, Consent, and Demographics

1. Introduction & Ethics

- Greet the participant and thank them for their time.
- Re-introduce yourself and the purpose of the study: "Thank you again for agreeing to participate in our study, which aims to better understand the experiences of individuals who have been treated for a chronic bone infection following a fracture. We want to learn from you about how this condition has affected different parts of your life."
- Re-confirm consent: "As discussed, our conversation will be audio-recorded, transcribed anonymously, and direct quotes may be used in publications

without any identifying information. Everything you share is confidential.
Are you still comfortable proceeding with the recording?"

- Remind the participant that there are no right or wrong answers and that they can take a break or stop at any time.

2. Brief Demographic & Clinical Information

"To begin, I'd like to ask just a few background questions for our records."

- Participant Code (Assigned):
- Age:
- Gender:
- Site of Infection (e.g., tibia, femur):
- Approximate time since initial fracture (years/months):
- Approximate time since FRI diagnosis (years/months):
- Number of related surgeries undergone:

Part B: Core Interview Questions (Organized by Thematic Domains)

Domain 1: Illness Journey & Diagnostic Experience

- **Core Question 1:** "Could you start by telling me the story of how you first realized there was a problem with your fracture healing? What happened?"
- **Prompts:** What were the first signs or symptoms? What did you think was happening? What did your doctors tell you at that time? How was the infection finally diagnosed?

Domain 2: Physical Health & Treatment Burden

- **Core Question 2:** "Thinking about your physical health, what has been the most challenging symptom or physical effect of dealing with this bone infection?"
- **Prompts:** Could you describe your experience with pain? Have you had issues like wound drainage or smell? How has your mobility and ability to

use the affected limb changed? What has the experience of multiple surgeries and long-term antibiotics been like for your body?

Domain 3: Psychological & Emotional Impact

- **Core Question 3:** "Living with and being treated for this condition can take an emotional toll. How has this entire experience affected you emotionally or mentally?"
- **Prompts:** What thoughts or worries are often on your mind? How do you cope with the uncertainty about the future or potential recurrence? Have there been times you felt particularly frustrated, anxious, or hopeless? What has helped you during the most difficult times?

Domain 4: Social Life, Roles, and Relationships

- **Core Question 4:** "How has this condition affected your day-to-day life, your roles at home or work, and your relationships with family and friends?"
- **Prompts:** Have you been able to continue working or your usual daily activities? How have your relationships with family members or friends changed? Do you participate in social or leisure activities as you used to? Do you ever feel isolated or misunderstood because of your condition?

Domain 5: Economic and Healthcare System Burden

- **Core Question 5:** "Managing a serious infection often involves significant use of healthcare and personal resources. Can you tell me about the practical and financial aspects of your treatment journey?"
- **Prompts:** What has the process of seeking and receiving care been like (e.g., navigating different hospitals, doctors)? What has been the financial impact on you and your family? How has insurance coverage worked for your treatments? Are there other non-medical costs (travel, caregiving, lost income) that have been a burden?

Domain 6: Support Needs and Communication

- **Core Question 6:** "Looking back, what kind of support or information do you feel would have been most helpful to you during this journey, that maybe you didn't get enough of?"
- **Prompts:** What was communication like with your healthcare team? Was information about your condition, treatment options, and prognosis clear? What kind of support—from medical professionals, family, community, or other patients—do you wish you had? What advice would you give to a patient newly diagnosed with FRI, or to their doctors?

Part C: Conclusion

- **Core Question 7:** "Is there anything important about your experience with this bone infection that we haven't talked about, that you feel is crucial for us or for doctors to understand?"
- **Closing:** Thank the participant profoundly for their candor, time, and valuable contribution. Reiterate the confidentiality of their data. Ask if they have any final questions. Stop the recording.