


## Children's fears in hospital



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## UN Convention on Rights of the Child 1989

- Art. 12 Respect for the views of the child
- (1) "States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child."
- Staff caring for children in hospital should be able and willing to listen to them, to treat them with respect, to successfully communicate with them and in matters of dissent be able and willing to reach an amicable agreement.
- <http://www.each-for-sick-children.org>

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## What do we know about children and their fears ?

## My Research Studies

- STUDY 1 - interviews with **11 children aged 7-14 years** from 4 paediatric wards in two **hospitals in UK**. 8 had chronic conditions (asthma, orthopaedic, skin conditions) and 3 acute.
- STUDY 2 - interviews with **17 children & YP aged 7-16 years** from two hospitals (two children's hospitals and one district general hospital) in Ireland. 7 had chronic conditions (renal, epilepsy, orthopaedic) and 10 acute conditions (cellulitis, abdominal pain).
- STUDY 3- interviews with **55 children & YP aged 7-18 years** from two children's hospitals and one district general hospital in Ireland. Children with acute (n=27) & chronic conditions (n= 28).

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## Findings



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## Fears about separation from family & friends

- Experience disruption to:
  - Family routines
  - Normal everyday activities
  - Peer relationships
  - School achievement

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## Fears about unfamiliar environment



### FEARS

- The unknown
- Strange environment
- Healthcare professionals
- Risk of infection

### Dislikes:

- Noisy ward
- Bright lights at night
- Hot environment
- Seeing other sick children
- Lack of privacy
- 'Babyish' play facilities
- Food

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## Fears about investigations and treatments.



### Fears of:

- Operations
- Needles
- Mistakes in treatment
- Harm to body
- Mutilation
- Pain
- Altered body image
- Dying

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## Fears about loss of self-determination



- Loss of independence
- Restricted activities

### Lacking control over

- personal needs
- sleeping and waking time
- food / meal times
- timing of procedures

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## Hospitals are scary places



- It's scary cause the hospital is big and like I don't know. I don't know anybody here ...and I don't think that I have ever been in this part of the hospital before. I do think it's a scary place (Boy aged 9).

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## Hospitals are busy places



- I was afraid of the traffic. You know all the people going up ...down, up...down and then they might have something dangerous in their hands trying to sort something out and then you know you might accidentally bang into them and you'd hurt everybody and yourself (Girl aged 9)

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## Misconceptions about hospitals



- I was worried as in the olden days you went into hospital and you lost one of your fingers...they would chop your hand off right and bend it like that, they would put this black stuff on and it heats it up and it hurts...we got told in a book by our school and I remember it but I can only remember that bit (Boy aged 7)

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### Feeling scared for others



- I have been in a few times now but just seeing other people sick and stuff like that. I don't like seeing other people not well...it makes me feel uncomfortable. I don't like being around other sick people because it makes me scared about all the other things that can happen to you (Girl, aged 15)

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### Scary people



- I'd be like 'yuck' it's seven in the morning and I am waking up to a load of doctors at the end of my bed...so that was kind of scary and I'd be there asleep and suddenly somebody would wake you up and all of a sudden there are loads of people standing at the end of the bed looking at me. I hadn't a clue who they were (Girl aged 16)

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### Fear scary investigations



- I did not know what to expect really if it was going to be dangerous. I don't know much about the treatments. I had to get a camera up my nose...so it's kind of a bit scary when you don't know what is happening. Even more worried because they sound so bad even if they are just small things (Girl aged 13).

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### Fear of blood tests



- I have been in and out of hospital all of my life and I wasn't sure if I wanted to come back into the hospital again...because I would be afraid that the nurses or doctors would just come in and do things to me like take bloods or other things that might hurt or anything like that...or the IV team...cause they are always come in (Girl aged 12).

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### Fear of dying



- I didn't want to come in here I felt really scared and I don't like when I see people going to the operating room on a table and that...cause like when I watch films of someone going in hospital and having an operation like some people die cause of different things and I keep saying I don't want an operation or whatever because I feel that I am going to die but like quite a few of my friends have had operations, they haven't died though have they? (Girl aged 11)

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### Excluded from information is scary



- When a doctor tells you to leave the room and talk to your parents it makes me scared and I think he should include me (Boy aged 11).

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## Remembering

- *...And then I remember this piece of cotton wool with a hole in, I think it went over my mouth and my nose. And then I remember this spray, spraying something in my face and I remember kicking and screaming terrible. [cries] I remember, Sister [Name], I think she was a theatre assistant and I remember her holding my legs down. I remember her getting hold of my legs and holding them down. I don't remember anymore, but it was terrible. [pause] Those things don't happen anymore do they? [cries].*

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## How can healthcare staff help?



## Explain information in simple words



- If doctors and nurses work in a children's hospital **they should be able to talk to children in a language** that children can understand (Boy aged 11).
- My wish is that doctors and nurses talk to me (Girl aged 7).

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## Preparation is essential



- Studies which used preparation strategies reported lower levels of anxiety in children preoperatively and post-operatively (Brewer *et al.*, 2006; Ellerton & Merriam, 1994; Lynch, 1994).

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## Other strategies to reduce fears



- Encourage parents to stay
- Allow siblings to visit & play
- Hospital décor & bed space
- Laptop, computer games, mobile devices
- Play therapy
- Teach the child's coping techniques
- Give the child TIME

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## Trends across Europe

- Shorter length of stay
- Increased acuity
- Increased chronic conditions
- Staff education and shortages
- New technologies & equipment
- Lack of play specialists



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## Conclusion

- Hospital environments need to be more child-centered
- It is essential that children's views are elicited about the delivery of their care.
- Children are more likely to be less distressed if their views are listened to and they know what is happening.

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## Conclusion



Listen to the children  
Find out what they fear  
Find out what they dislike  
Try to reduce their fears  
Make their stay easier  
They do remember !

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## Thank You

- *My one big wish is that nurses and doctors would explain things better to children (Child, 10years)*

- **Thank you – all questions are welcomed**
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