

From a Child's Perspective

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Entering the Hospital

Sarah

Sarah, now aged 10 is a frequent visitor to “Clifftree Children’s Hospital”, in some ways it’s almost like a second home. Sarah had heart troubles when she was born and has had three life-saving operations and multiple stays in hospitals. Entering the hospital whether for a check-up or even for a stay, is much less of a struggle now than when she was little. It doesn’t fill her with dread although she doesn’t particularly want to be there either. Sarah knows the hospital is somewhere she has to go to feel better, her parents have told her this countless times. She knows the doctors and nurses very well, one of the nurses, Annie, is her favourite. Annie always smiles at her, tells jokes and brings her treats. The doctors tell her she’s “their favourite patient” but Sarah thinks they say that to all of the children. Sarah usually stays on Ward D where there’s pretty views out of the window of trees and birds. There’s paintings of animals on the walls and the play team keep Sarah busy with crafts and games. Sarah particularly likes to paint and make friends with the other children.

Jack

Jack, aged 8 has been in Ward D at “Clifftree Children’s Hospital” for 20 hours, he’s never been to hospital before, except when he was born, but the doctor has told him he probably has a nasty bug and needs to stay there. Jack thinks this is a bit weird as usually his mum can make everything better and he would much rather be at home. When he came into the hospital he could see the long grey corridors with children being whizzed around on beds with wheels, surely, if you’re going to make beds with wheels you should at least try and make them look like a train or spaceship or something cool he thought. There were lots of signs to places he had never been to or heard of and lots of people he didn’t know. Thankfully Jack had his Dad with him. That way Jack could cling onto his Dad for safety and not talk to the countless strangers who tried to offer him old building blocks and Fireman Sam toys. Jack wondered whether they had never heard of Nerf guns and Lego before. Things turned worse for Jack when his Dad had to leave for an hour, his Dad gave him a kiss and said he would be back as soon as possible after checking on things at home. Jack was terrified. Jack cried for the entire hour.

Rachel

Rachel’s big brother has been staying on Ward D at “Clifftree Children’s Hospital” for the last 3 weeks. He’s called Daniel and is 9 years old, he’s 3 years older than Rachel. Daniel has a type of cancer but Rachel doesn’t know what that actually means. Rachel likes to visit

Daniel and misses him at home even if he is a super annoying big brother. Rachel has been screaming at her parents recently at the idea of sharing a room with her little sister Lilly, but that doesn't seem quite so bad now Daniel has to share his room in the hospital with 5 other children. Rachel would never want to stay here although Daniel does seem to get much more attention than her since he's come to hospital. It's all "fuss, fuss, fuss" she thinks. Rachel would miss her toys, she likes Charlie and Lola everything: bed sheets, books, games and soft toys. She can't spot Charlie and Lola here, although the painting and crafts that she saw the other day looked quite fun and Daniel seems happy with his selection of toys.

Ouch that Hurts

Sarah

Sarah likes it when people call her 'a brave girl' and even now after many visits she still collects the colourful stickers the nurses give out. When the doctors come to take her blood in tiny test tubes or to put a tube into her hand she tries her hardest to be brave and she rarely cries. She doesn't need the play team to come and distract her anymore. She knows how it feels and that it only really hurts for a split second. In fact the last few times Sarah has actually watched and found it interesting. She thinks she might be a nurse when she grows up. What Sarah doesn't like is when a different doctor comes who she hasn't met before and treats her a bit like a baby, she knows they are trying to be kind, but after all she's a grown up girl now.

Jack

Jack had never had blood taken before, only his injections when he was a baby, and like any baby at the time probably screamed, unsurprisingly he can't remember. The doctor took Jack's blood when his Dad was back with him, they had tried earlier in the day but Jack was having none of it. He screamed as loudly as he could and hid his arms. He didn't want a needle anywhere near his arm as he was certain it would really hurt. Later Jack had calmed a little and liked the lady who had come back with the doctor, she'd actually brought nerf guns with her so he thought she must be cool. Her name was Jane and she distracted Jack whilst he sat on his Dad's knee having a cuddle whilst the doctor took the blood test. It did really hurt, more than anything Jack can remember and Jack was surprised that there was no huge cut or bruise to show as a war wound to his friends. Jane also left him with some Lego to play with which almost made him smile a little. Jack hadn't spoke to the doctors or nurses all day but felt it was important to make the doctor promise not to take his blood again, so he plucked up the courage to speak out loud. Sadly the doctor couldn't promise this and instead promised that his Dad and a play team member would be there when he had to have blood taken next.

Rachel

Rachel doesn't like it when the doctor comes round sometimes to see Daniel as he has to leave when they are midway through a game of Guess Who or Uno. This makes her sad. They take him into a different room, Rachel has to stay with one of her parents. Daniel

always comes back sad too with a plaster on his arm. He tells Rachel they put a needle in his arm, she doesn't understand why he doesn't run away from them screaming. She would. Daniel also tells Rachel about all the toys and sweets Mum and Dad are going to buy him when he gets better. Rachel again feels a bit sad that Daniel is getting all the attention. She has seen a Charlie and Lola backpack she would really love to have.

Routines

Sarah

At home Sarah always helps in the house, her jobs are laying the table, cutting the vegetables for dinner, cleaning her room and helping wash the car. She always does her homework on time and does well in school. When she goes into hospital the teacher gives her work to do for when she is well enough, although when Annie isn't one of her nurses she doesn't know who to ask for help. Sometimes Sarah gets bored in hospital there's only so many books you can read, paintings to draw, and CD's to listen to. Sometimes she thinks about what she could do to help: painting new pictures for the walls? Designing quizzes or games? Making fun name badges for the nurses? Sarah has lots of ideas so Annie put an ideas box on the ward yesterday which Sarah thought was a great plan as now she can share all of her ideas from her times in hospital.

Jack

Jack has always been a light sleeper: the dog barking, the wind howling, a door banging, a toilet flushing and Jack will wake up. He doesn't get nightmares but sometimes he will sleep walk. One Christmas Eve he opened all his presents under the tree, his parents however, aren't quite so convinced he was sleep walking on that occasion. On Jack's first night on the ward he didn't sleep a wink. Other children were coughing, heavily breathing, he could hear doors banging and whispers and to top all that he had forgotten Fred, his teddy who he has had since he was born. He hoped more than anything that he could go home the next day. However, Jack needed to stay in hospital the following night and so his Dad slept over with him, Jack cuddled Fred who had arrived that morning and listened to bedtime stories to fall asleep. He slept so much better.

Rachel

Rachel visits her brother most days with her Mum, Dad and little sister. She likes coming, except on Tuesdays and Wednesdays but she is usually made to come. On Tuesdays Rachel usually goes to ballet classes and on Wednesday she has swimming both of which she adores. One day she would love to be a ballet dancer. Her parents tell her it's important to see her brother and they can't visit him and take her to the classes. She feels a bit bad for wanting to go to ballet and swimming still, but she misses her friends and may not get to be in the dance show if she doesn't practice enough. Hopefully Daniel will be better soon and come back home and then she can go to ballet again.

Conclusions

Children have a right to an identity, to express their views and feelings, to develop their personality, learn and be protected as set out by the UN Convention on the Rights of a Child. (1) This applies at home, at school, in hospital and wherever a child is spending time. Allowing children to voice or show their opinions not only allows the medical team to care for that individual child more appropriately but can be used to influence paediatric care more widely.

One study looking at children's views of hospitalisation (based on 213 patients) found physical environment, including food, games and TV to be the most mentioned point of discussion. There was variation in discussion points between different age groups. (2) It is vitally important for us to be aware of what factors are important to children.

As we do for adults, when we take a history from a child we need to take their "social history" and gain an understanding of their personality to ensure we are providing the best possible care for them. It may be important to cover everything from sleep, eating, hobbies, fears, friends, family, toys, likes, and dislikes. Children have their own individual thoughts and feelings about being in hospital and each experience will stick with them and potentially affect their next visit to hospital, which could be many years later or in to adulthood.

Although Sarah, Jack and Rachel are fictional patients I hope their stories remind us of the individual characters, personalities and needs of our smaller patients.

References

- 1. UNICEF. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. 1989. Available at: [unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)**
- 2. Carney T, Murphy S, McClure J et al. Children's views of hospitalisation: an exploratory study of data collection. Journal of Child Health Care. 2003; 7(1): 27-40.**