Importance of Play for Hospitalized Children

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"Play is a child’s work and this is not a trivial pursuit", says Alfred Adler. Play provides children the opportunities to be free, creative and expressive. Play is synonymous with being a child and it is the universal language of children. Play allows children to learn social behaviour, develop cognitive abilities as well as gross and fine motor skills, and work through emotional conflicts. Hospitalization to any child is a very unpleasant and traumatic experience. The child undergoes a break from his normal routine, feels separated, encounters strangers and is subjected to a lot of interventions which are directed to the promotion of his health, but aggravate his pain and suffering.

The hospital is also an unfamiliar environment and hospitalization is a frightening experience to the child. The investigator from her observation feels that a child most often looks dull, anxious or afraid in the hospital. Many parents also verbalize that their children who are generally sociable and outgoing become very passive after their admission to the hospital.

Hospitalized children require more than recreational play because illness and hospitalization constitute crisis in a child’s life and since these situations are fraught with overwhelming stresses, children need to play out their fears and anxieties as a means of coping with these stresses. Play also helps temporarily to divert their mind from pain and loneliness.

**Broad Objective**

To determine the knowledge, attitude and practice of parents and nursing personnel regarding the importance of play needs in hospitalized children between the age group of one month to twelve years.

**Specific Objectives**

- To determine the knowledge of parents and nursing personnel regarding the importance of play needs of children during their hospital stay.
- To assess the attitude of parents and nursing personnel regarding the importance of play for children during hospitalization.
- To access the practice of parents and nursing personnel in providing play and provision of play material for hospitalized children.

**Methodology**

The study was conducted in the pediatric wards of the Christian Medical College and Hospital, Vellore. All mothers, fathers or mother substitutes were staying with the child in the hospital and all staff nurses were with a B.Sc. Degree or Diploma in nursing, and Auxiliary Nurse Midwives.

**Data Collection**

The investigator used an interview guide to collect information from the parents who fulfilled the inclusion criteria, after obtaining their consent. A questionnaire was administered to the nursing personnel, which they had to fill in. The investigator throughout the day observed one particular nursing personnel, using an observational checklist to assess if play therapy was encouraged or provided for the sick children receiving her care.

**Data Management and Analysis**

All information obtained from the parents using the interview guide and the completed questionnaire by the nursing personnel and the assessment of the practice of the nursing personnel using the observational checklist were tabulated separately. The Descriptive Inferential Statistical method was used for the analysis of data. After tabulation of the raw data was done for all the questions, numbers and percentages were obtained. The mean scores and Standard Deviation was also computed for all the sections.

**Results and Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to assess the knowledge, attitude and practice of the parents and nursing personnel regarding the importance of play.
needs in hospitalized children between the age group of one month to twelve years. The assessment of the knowledge of parents reveals that 99.07% had adequate knowledge and 0.93% had a moderately adequate knowledge regarding the importance of play needs in children. The assessment of the knowledge of nursing personnel reveals that 86.11% of them had adequate knowledge and 13.89% had a moderately adequate knowledge regarding the importance of play in hospitalized children.

The assessment of the attitude of the parents reveals that 27.77% of them had a most favorable attitude towards the importance of play in hospitalized children and 72.22% of parents had a favorable attitude towards the importance of play in children.

Findings related to the attitude of parents
There were 51.85% of parents who felt that playing with other children was not good as their child would learn bad language and bad habits, and also have conflicts while playing which would lead to misunderstanding among the parents and their neighbors. Some of the parents (48.15%) felt that allowing a sick hospitalized child to play with medical equipment like stethoscope, spatula, syringes etc will help in alleviating the child’s fears.

The assessment of the attitude of the nursing personnel shows that 94.44% of them had most favorable attitude towards the importance of play in children. The findings show that the practice of 31.48% of parents was adequate and the practice of 68.52% of parents in relation to providing toys, bringing the child’s toys to the hospital on admission and allowing the child to play with other children was moderately adequate. The findings regarding the socio-economic status revealed that majority (74.98%) of the parents of these children receive a monthly income of less than 4 thousand rupees and that could be a reason for being unable to spend on toys. The practice of 97.22% of the nursing personnel in relation to provision of play and play material to the child was found to be inadequate and 2.77% of their practice was found to be moderately adequate. Some of the important observations made by the investigator revealed that none of the nursing personnel provided any play material for diverting the attention of children undergoing painful procedures.

There is a playroom provided in each of the pediatric ward and the nursing personnel are expected to orient the parents to these playrooms on their admission into the ward. But 87.03% of parents verbalized that they were not aware of this facility since the nursing staff had not informed them. This could be one reason why the play rooms were found empty.

Implications for Nursing Practices
- The nursing personnel have to plan and allot time everyday to provide play for children.
- They can encourage parents to play with the child.
- They can advise parents to bring the child’s favorite toys, story books and coloring material to the hospital.
- Play can be organized for children with the help of nursing students in the ward.
- Toys can be provided to the child undergoing a painful procedure in order to divert the child from painful sensations.
- The nursing personnel can conduct group teachings for parents regarding play, the selection of age-appropriate toys and play material. This will serve as an excellent form of diversion to children from feelings of loneliness, pain and an unfamiliar hospital environment.

The investigator feels if the nursing personnel carry out these interventions, children will be able to accept hospitalization and cope with traumatic experience and comply with the treatment. The incorporation of play in every aspect of child care will also help in hastening the child’s recovery process, which is the ultimate goal of hospitalization. These measures will enhance the ability of nursing personnel in providing quality care, not only in terms of meeting the physical needs of the child but also in the overall mental and social development of the child.

Recommendations
- A similar study can be done to assess the knowledge, attitude and practice of student nurses in relation to provision of play for children.
- A toy bank can be set up in the pediatric department and the staff and students of other departments can
be encouraged to give away unused toys to the person in charge of the toy bank. Nursing personnel can distribute the toys to children.

- The children can also be taken to the play room where play can be organized because a play room without toys or children will not serve the purpose of its existence in the ward.

Conclusion
The study findings have shown that the knowledge of both parents and nursing personnel is adequate. The attitude of parents towards the importance of play for children during their hospital stay is favorable. Yet the practice of parents in regard to meeting the play needs of children is moderately adequate and the practice of the nursing personnel is grossly inadequate.

Bibliography
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