

Introduction

Care of Sick Child

The sick children need hospitalization. It is a stressful experience for both children and their families. Hospitalization leads to interruption of the child's active growth and development. The child is removed from daily routine of home and brought in an unfamiliar setting causing loss of contact with siblings, relatives, and peers.

HOSPITAL ENVIRONMENT FOR SICK CHILD

Hospitalization may be emotionally and developmentally damaging to the child. It causes stress due to unbalance between environmental and societal demands and child's coping abilities. Following aspects of hospital environment may be stressful for the child:

A Social Environment

Social environment means the people around. When a child is admitted in a hospital, his social environment includes members of the health team and other patients and their relatives, apart from one or two of his/her family members. This is a strange social environment for the child.

B. Physical Environment

Physical environment means the setting or place and the things around. Hospital's physical environment includes the ward or room, machines, and equipment. There are many unfamiliar objects, sounds, and smells in hospital which are stressful for the child.

C Change in Routine

The children admitted in hospital may have to undergo various diagnostic and therapeutic procedures which are stressful for both the children and their family. Hospitalization leads to altered nutritional and sleep patterns of the child. New environment of hospital may lead to reduced appetite and may cause anxiety in the child. During hospitalization, the child may be kept NPO or given nasogastric feeding or parenteral feeds as prescribed by the physician. Also, his sleep pattern may be disturbed due to higher noise level in the ward. This alteration in nutritional and sleep patterns leads to distress in children.

PREPARATION OF HOSPITAL ENVIRONMENT FOR THE CHILD

Hospitalization is a traumatic event for the child, but it can be made comfortable. It is the nurses' responsibility to make hospital stay pleasant. This can be done by taking the following actions:

- 1) Nurses warm approach and their concern can help the child and his family to cope-up with hospitalization in a positive way,
- 2) The child and his family should be introduced to the physician incharge of the child and other members of health team who are going to take care of the child in hospital
- 3) The child and his family should be acquainted with the ward and the places they may be required to go during hospital stay
- 4) The child should be made familiar with the equipment's around him and their sounds.
- 5) Likes and dislikes of the child related to food should be kept in mind while planning for his diet
- 6) The environment should be calm and quiet to promote sleep
- 7) Parents should be allowed to stay with the child
- 8) Parents should be involved in care of the child
- 9) There should be provision of play and recreation in the hospital.
- 10) The ward setting should be pleasing and attractive. For example, the walls of the ward may have cartoon characters painted over, bed linen and hospital dress for patient may have floral print or nursery pattern. Also there should be a separate room for painful procedures so that all children of the ward do not get disturbed while any painful procedure is being done on any patient

IMPACT OF HOSPITALIZATION ON CHILD AND FAMILY

A. Impact on Parents/Response of Parents

The parents of a hospitalized child experience an increase in stress as a result of a number of factors which include

- (1) Lack of Information and knowledge related to child's illness
- (2)) Fear of procedures and treatment of child
- (3) Fear of unknown that what will happen to child in future.
- (4) Fear of financial burden on family.

Along with stress, parents feel guilty as if the child's illness is because of them. They experience anxiety, fear and disappointment. Parents are separated from their children so they feel helpless as they are not able to provide care to the child. At times parents may show anger, hostile and aggressive behavior towards members of health team if anything goes wrong with the child error is done.

B. Impact of Hospitalization on Child

Hospitalization is a completely new experience for infants and children. Since parents tend to be anxious, their feeling of fear is communicated to their children. Impact of hospitalization on pediatric patients depends upon their age and stage of development.

(1) Reaction of Infants:

Infants under 6 months of age tend to show less anxiety in response to hospitalization than in later months. Infants may be emotionally disturbed due to separation from their parents. They may suffer from sensory deprivation if the nursing personnel do not provide loving care that they need. Older infants (8-12 months) show separation anxiety by excessive crying and clinging to parents.

2) Reaction of Toddlers:

The reactions of toddlers to illness and hospitalization depends on the degree of separation from mother, loss of freedom or autonomy and fear of pain and restraints. According to Robertson (1958, 1963) reaction of children to hospitalization includes protest, despair and denial or detachment.

a. **Protest:** The toddler protests by crying, is restless, attempts to escape to find parents and may verbally or physically attack nurses who try to provide care. Toddlers perceive hospitalization as abandonment or punishment of wrong doing.

b. **Despair:** Toddler shows despair by becoming quieter, withdrawn, apathetic and depressed. The child cries frequently and finds comfort by thumb sucking, bedwetting, regressing and tightly holding the security object like a toy.

C Denial or Detachment: If toddler stays in hospital without parents for long duration then he starts getting adjusted to hospital environment. They start denying the need of parental love. The child does not cry in absence of mother and becomes more attached to nurses.

(ii) Reaction of Preschool Child

Hospitalized preschool child frequently expresses stress and separation anxiety. Some preschoolers may show regression and have night mares due to strangeness of the environment. The child may become extremely dependent on caregivers

(iv) Reaction of School Children

School children respond to hospitalization with fear, anxiety, anger and frequent guilt. Fear of mutilation and death is seen in school children. As school children are excessively concerned about their body image, they need physical stimulation and may masturbate. These children usually exhibit less distressed behavior such as crying and less motor aggression towards caregivers than younger children

(v) Reaction of Adolescents

Adolescents may have a difficult time in adjusting to hospitalization. Hospital rules and regulations may cause frustration in adolescents as they represent an extension of parental authority. In addition adolescents find it difficult to accept dependency and restrictions. They may also experience emotional swings resulting in behavior that is warm and acceptable one minute and rude the next

ROLE OF NURSE IN CARE OF HOSPITALIZED CHILDREN

Nurses can play a significant role in helping the child and family members to cope up with stress of Hospitalization

❖ Care of Infants

After the admission of an infant to the hospital and completion of pediatric history and assessment, the nurse's major responsibility is to encourage participation of parents in meeting the physical and emotional needs of infant. The nurse can make parents participate in administration of medications, performing procedures, feeding the infants, etc) in this way she can minimize the separation anxiety among infants, also the parents are prepared for post hospitalization care of the infant

❖ Care of Toddlers

Nursing care of toddlers during hospitalization should focus on:

1. Preserving the toddler's trust in parents
2. Helping the child express anger and
3. Encouraging frequent visits of parents so that child is not deprived of parental love.

Any regressive behavior of the toddler should be accepted without any punishment to the toddler. Depending on the child's condition, he should be encouraged to play and be physically active. This helps the child in retaining a sense of autonomy and security, thereby preventing regressive behavior.

❖ **In Preschool Children**

Though the effects of separation anxiety are less acute in preschoolers than toddlers, they still feel secure in the presence of their parents. Rooming-in can be practiced so as to allow maximum contact between parents and preschooler. These children may be allowed to express their feelings through play so that the trauma of hospitalization is reduced. The child should be encouraged to participate in self-care activities, if possible.

❖ **In School Children**

School-aged children view hospitalization as punishment. Immobilization is the most difficult aspect of hospitalization for them. Children must be encouraged to watch TV, read books, etc., so that they do not feel bored. Hospitalization makes them feel like they are losing self-control and independence. Children in this age group have developed a sense of modesty, so it should be considered while giving any sort of physical care to them. Children must be provided privacy during care. They must be encouraged to take an active part in their treatment and self-care. Children should be allowed to express their fears, anxiety, and doubts. The nurse should help the children to talk about their feelings, and therapeutic communication should be encouraged.

❖ **In Adolescents**

The role of the nurse when caring for adolescents includes understanding the emotional impact of illness on them, helping them to participate in their treatment program, and providing the care that they need. Adolescents when admitted to hospital enter a world where they are unaware of what will happen to them, which leads to fear and anxiety. So the nurse should routinely communicate with them and provide the needed information. Reassurance and encouragement towards self-care will help adolescents gain their self-esteem and independence.