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Title: Children in hospital over Christmas

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Nursing children in hospital over Christmas requires a thoughtful and compassionate Child and Family Centred Care (CFCC) approach that honours the rights of every child (Al-Motlaq et al., 2021; Foster & Blamires, 2023; United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 1989). It is important to approach every child and family with empathy, sensitivity, and cultural competence recognizing that the holiday season can be a challenging time. Spending Christmas in hospital can have a significant impact on children, both emotionally and psychologically that is further influenced by the child's individual demographic characteristics such as illness, age, gender, country, culture and family structure/relationships (Foster et al., 2022; Foster & Whitehead, 2019). Children can experience heightened emotional distress, loneliness, frustration, a lack of control/autonomy, anxiety, fear, uncertainty, loss, disruption to family traditions and miss being at home with their families during a time when social connections are emphasized (Barnes, 2019; Bensink et al., 2006; Rainbow Trust, 2023). This impact is not limited to the hospitalised child as siblings and parents also experience stress and emotional strain due to the child's hospitalization over Christmas (Nolbris & Hellström, 2005; Nolbris & Nilsson, 2017). In addition, younger children may worry that Father Christmas will not know where they are and older children will be aware they are missing out on family festivities/gatherings (Little Journey Health, 2022; Rainbow Trust, 2023). In London, one child health play specialist stated that her response to reduce this anxiety in children was *"Although you are in hospital, we make sure to let Santa know exactly where you are so he can make sure your presents are delivered. If you have forgotten to write your letter to Santa, you can do it right from the ward and ask one of the team to send it off for you"* (Little Journey Health, 2022). Support from hospital staff, family, and friends, along with engaging CFCC activities, can contribute to a child's, and family's ability to cope with hospitalisation over Christmas. Healthcare providers, child life specialists, and support staff play a crucial role in addressing the psychosocial and emotional needs of children during hospitalization.

The psychosocial and emotional needs of children in healthcare have received greater attention over the past ten years and it is heartwarming to see efforts made to bring joy to children in hospital as was evident in Anne Marie's Christmas when 'a promise was kept, a dream came true, and a little girl was able to celebrate Christmas with her family' when the Intensive Care Unit team made it possible for her to spend time at home on Christmas day (Sarnaik et al., 2016). The incredible dedication shown by staff was also evident in Brandon's story (Bogetz, 2020). Many Children's Hospitals and communities organize special events and initiatives to make the holiday season brighter for children over Christmas. Some of these initiatives include decorating the hospital wards with festive lights, ornaments, and decorations; providing Christmas gifts donated by individuals, organisations and/or businesses; a visit from Father Christmas; providing craft sessions where children can create holiday-themed art and crafts; carol singing or music performances; virtual celebrations for children in protective isolation; special meals; storytelling and reading sessions; having a themed Christmas party and providing support, resources, and activities that involve family to ensure a more inclusive supportive environment (Barnes, 2019; Bensink et al., 2006; Rainbow Trust, 2023). These initiatives not only bring joy to children but also create a sense of community connectedness and support for families going through difficult times. However, it has been reported that children who are in adult wards, rural areas, lower socioeconomic areas, and/or child and adolescent mental health services inpatient units do not receive the same public attention over Christmas and have been referred to as 'the forgotten children' (BMJ Opinion, 2019; Park et al., 2016). This may be due to the stigma around mental health in general or that children with self-inflicted injuries are looked upon as less deserving (BMJ Opinion, 2019). There needs to be more awareness, to tackle mental health stigma, more resources available, and awareness of the impact of hospitalisation on children over Christmas so every child and young person knows they are valued (BMJ Opinion, 2019; Park et al., 2016).

In essence, every effort to bring a sense of normalcy and joy can make a significant impact on the well-being of children, and their families during this time. It is very important to create a supportive and empathetic CFCC environment, along with incorporating activities that bring a sense of normalcy and joy, and by involving families in the care process the emotional impact of spending Christmas in hospital can be reduced.

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