

The Psychologist in The Hospital

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"Wonder woman had come to Kristin's house and asked her to become the newest member of her Superpower Team. Wonder woman had given Kristine special powers. These special powers made her very strong and tough so that she could overcome almost anything. Wonder woman asked her to take some tests to try out these superpowers. The tests were called bone marrow aspirations and injections. These tests hurt, but with her new superpowers, Kristin could take real deep breaths and could lie very still. Wonder woman was very proud when she found out that her superpowers worked so well, and introduced Kristin as a new member of the Superpower Team." (Jay, et al., 1985).

The last 15 years a lot of research has been done about possible strategies to reduce pain and fear experiences with children and adolescents during painful medical procedures. The use of emotive imagery or the above story-telling is only one specific technique that can be used in combination with other techniques, in the preparation of patients for medical procedures during their hospitalization. Which techniques are used depend on the age, previous experiences of the patient and on the kind of medical procedure the patient will undergo (injection, surgery,...).

Hospitalization

Hospitalization and hospital practices are far from comfortable for patients. Especially for children, who understand even less what's going on, admission to the hospital has an even greater impact and is often experienced as a traumatic event. Painful medical procedures, surgery, separation from family, friends, school, dealing

with a total unfamiliar situation in which nurses and doctors rule the world. Confrontation with other sick children makes hospitalization often a frightening event. Children might feel anxious about missing school. The hospital environment itself is perceived as isolating, lonely, and alien. They might worry about how to cope with it. Hospitals are places where children are hurt and undergo sometimes extremely painful procedures such as a lumbar puncture. In addition, hospitals can be very boring (Eiser, 1990).

The importance of considering children's psychological reactions to hospitalization and surgery was not recognized until the mid 1950s (La Greca & Stone, 1985). Early observations during the 50s and 60s of children's behavioral and emotional reactions to hospitalization and medical procedures were grim. Psychologists such as Bowlby stressed the permanent and adverse influence of early separation (anxiety) on further personality development.