

## INTRODUCTION

General awareness of the non-medical needs of children in hospital and the health care system has developed greatly over the last twenty years.

However, during this period of financial constraint, gains in the quality of psychosocial care of children need to be carefully monitored, as they are often the areas which are vulnerable to cost-saving programmes.

Dr. Lionel Lubitz, Consultant Paediatrician at the Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne, spoke recently at a public meeting organised by the Victorian Branch of AWCH. Dr. Lubitz's words express the spirit in which this survey report has been created.

'There are so many noxious influences in the process of hospitalisation that we must go out of our way to reduce the trauma. What do we do? Here follow the Ten Commandments:

- 1 We prepare the child and parents by careful explanation of what they should expect.
- 2 We minimise pain, by our expertise or by using medication or other techniques.
- 3 We work with the child within their family, as a team.
- 4 We involve parents in caring for their child, and very importantly, in all major decision-making processes. We never separate child and family.
- 5 We humanise the environment by making the ward less sterile and frightening.
- 6 We humanise ourselves, by appearing more like normal people.
- 7 We learn skills (and look at our own responses to stress) to deal with people in a crisis.
- 8 We try to communicate clearly, avoiding jargon and long medical words.
- 9 We develop both words and body language that are less threatening.
- 10 We address the CHILD, not simply regard the child as an appendage with no feelings or fears of their own.

Sometimes we do it well. We also fail at other times, not because we are uncaring and callous. We fail because we are working in a complex, fragile environment where it is easy to make mistakes. But we are always trying to do it better – and we do succeed in our efforts. We are getting better at looking after the whole child within their family, and not merely focusing on the disease or the organ involved. Our greatest teachers are our parents and their families. We learn our technical and knowledge-based skills from our universities, colleges and peers. We learn our human skills from our own

parents, our own children, and our patients and their families. These groups form the nucleus of organisations like AWCH. We have a very important mission, and we, the medical profession, are dependent on groups like AWCH to re-focus us on important human issues, to keep us open to new ideas on caring for children and constantly doing it better.'