

SECTION 2: PREPARATION FOR ADMISSION

Pre-admission Preparation

SUMMARY OF CONCEPTS

Both parents and children need information that helps them to prepare for their roles in the hospital experience (NAWCH, 1980; Gross, 1986; Meng & Zastowny, 1982; Petrillo & Azaroff, 1985).

It has been well documented that advance preparation for hospitalisation, health care procedures or impending surgery, provides children with a sense of mastery over the hospital environment and helps them to cope more effectively with this potentially highly stressful situation. Reducing fears of the unknown and therefore anxiety, fosters better adjustment and co-operation of children during their hospital stay (Adams, Gill & McDonald, 1991; Ellerton, Caty & Ritchie 1985; Price, 1991; Thompson, 1985).

Effective preparation programmes must be specifically designed taking children's ages and developmental stages into account (Beckmeyer & Bahr, 1980; Skipper & Leonard, 1968).

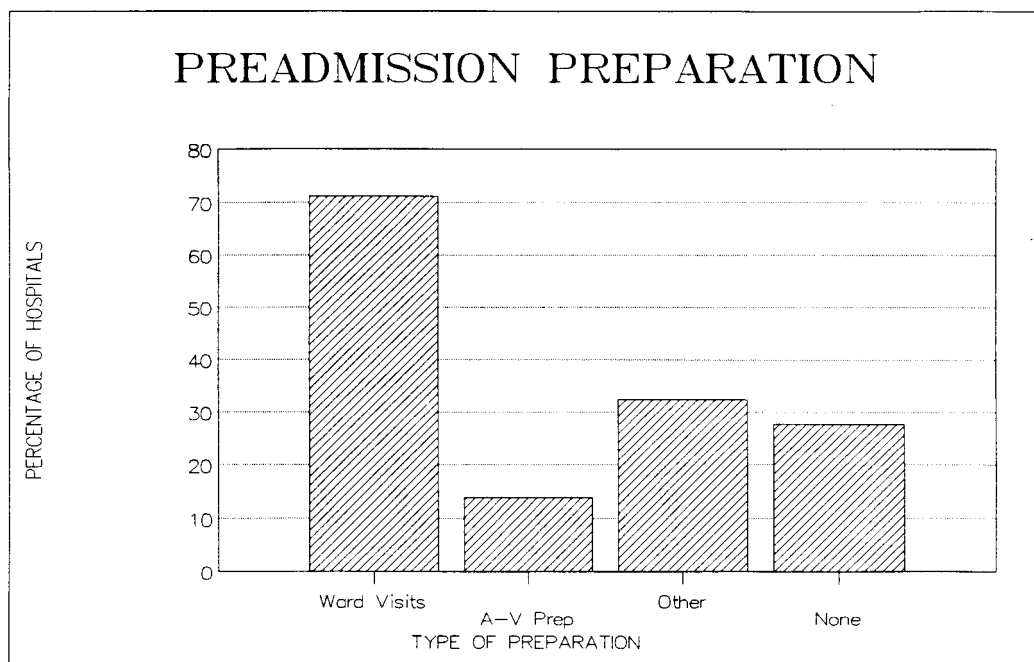
Story books and pictorial information or audio-visual materials are beneficial to facilitate understanding of the events and are recommended for preparing both parents and children (Melamed & Siegel, 1975). In addition, particularly for pre-school and school-aged children and their parents, pre-admission hospital tours or ward visits have been found to be very effective preparation tools, as they allow children the opportunity to ask questions and to have hands-on experience (Adams et al., 1991; Gross, 1896; Pass & Pass, 1987; Gaynard et al., 1990).

Preparation activities should not be viewed as a substitute for open discussions with the doctor about purposes and details of medical procedures and hospitalisation. Rather, they are an additional source of information and an important part of the psychological care for patients and their families.

SURVEY RESULTS

- ✦ In total 183 hospitals (72.3%) organise some pre-admission preparation activities (**Graph 5**).

Graph 5



- ✦ Of the 183 hospitals offering preparation, 80.9% (N=148) offer ward visits only and 3 (2.0%) offer audio-visual preparation only.

Only 32 hospitals (17.5%) offer both ward visits and audio-visual preparation. This includes 3 paediatric hospitals.

- ✦ Of the 183 hospitals offering pre-admission preparation, only 25.1% (N=46) advise parents about these activities in writing, in their admission letter. The remaining 74.9% (N=137) of hospitals, including one specialised paediatric hospital, rely on medical staff, schools and community groups or family and friends to inform parents that these activities are available. This may be a major reason for the relatively low attendance rates of these activities in many hospitals.
- ✦ Responses to 'other' preparation activities (**Graph 5**) were collated into three main areas: written or pictorial information, medical/role play activities or school/kindergarten visits.
- ✦ 34 hospitals (13.4%) mentioned that they distribute books, colouring-in books or pamphlets to children prior to or on admission. In one hospital this was the only form of preparation offered.
- ✦ A total of 10 hospitals (4%) reported regular, formally organised preparation activities such as play with medical instruments, role play or operating theatre visits prior to admission.

- ✦ 32 hospitals (12.6%) were also involved in organised school and kindergarten tours with varying degrees of regularity. For 8 hospitals this is the only preparation activity provided.
- ✦ 27.7% (N=70) of hospitals (with an average of 16 paediatric beds) do not offer any pre-admission preparation activities at all (Graph 5). 66% (N=46) of these would like to do so, 33% would not. Apart from time and financial restraints, a major reason for not providing this service was the small number of planned admissions.
- ✦ 84.2% of private hospitals (N=32) offer some form of preparation and 15.8% (N=6) offer no preparation at all, even though 78% of admissions to private hospitals are planned.

Written information for parents

SUMMARY OF CONCEPTS

It has been well established that young children will be affected by their parent's emotional state, often influencing the child's behaviour (Glasper & Stradling, 1989; Heffernan & Azarnoff, 1971; Mahaffy, 1965; Skipper & Leonard, 1968).

If parents are prepared for their child's hospitalisation and know what to expect, anxieties and fears are reduced. Parents can in turn provide effective preparation for their child. (Wolfer & Visintainer, 1975; Price, 1991).

Comprehensive written information should help parents to prepare themselves and their children for the hospital experience. Much information can be covered in well designed and easily written (multilingual) brochures (Jackson, Bradham & Burwell, 1978). It is often difficult for many parents to recall details given during the admission process, hence the importance of the provision of comprehensive written material.

Written information should include:

- hospital routines and their times
- the child's need for simple truthful explanations of the reason for hospitalisation
- encouragement for the child to bring a favourite toy or rug to hospital
- a reminder to tell ward staff of family names for toilet, eating habits and so on
- whether children can bring day clothes and their own pyjamas, and other requirements
- the need for frequent visiting by all family members and the importance of saying goodbye 'in spite of tears'
- clearly stated visiting hours and policies, e.g. for siblings
- the value of using live-in facilities for parents, particularly of young children, including details of accommodation, meals and other facilities, and costs
- whether meal tickets are provided, cafeteria or kiosk opening hours, etc.

- which aspects of basic care or nursing, in which parents are encouraged to participate
- information about any play programmes or suggested activities
- an explanation of possible behaviour changes in the child during and after hospitalisation
- encouragement to seek information or assistance

SURVEY RESULTS

- ✦ Basic written information about the hospital is provided by 84.4% (N=216) of participants. No written information at all is given by 12.3% (N=31) (**Graph 6**).
- ✦ 119 hospitals (47%) including all paediatric hospitals, provide specific reading material for parents to help them to prepare their child for hospitalisation.
- ✦ Of the 224 hospitals that provide written information, 11.1% (N=25) have this available in other languages, among them one paediatric hospital, and none of the private hospitals. However, over 50% of respondents indicated elsewhere in the questionnaire that families with limited English language skills attend their hospital.
- ✦ Even though in country areas it is often more difficult for patients to attend ward visits prior to admission, only 40.1% (N=67) of all country hospitals include preparation information for parents.
- ✦ 33 hospitals (13.0%), including 4 out of the 7 paediatric hospitals, provide access to a resource library for families covering medical, developmental and psychosocial topics.

Graph 6

