

Barnardos' submission into National Paediatric Hospital Development Board

March 2009

Barnardos welcomes the opportunity to input into the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board as it develops its Design Brief for the new children's hospital in Dublin. Barnardos believes that the principle of the best interests of the child should be the determining factor in designing services for the hospital and underlie all procedures and policies when the hospital is in operation.

Design of the building

"The physical environment may be as important for children's development as the social interpersonal environment."¹

"Health care is more than tending to bodily needs – the mental and emotional must also be looked after."²

Barnardos recommends that time be spent on the design of the hospital building to avoid the pitfalls that have beset other purpose built environments largely due to the architects / designers being experts in the principles of design but having little knowledge of child development. As a result, buildings may be designed and functioning with more of an eye to adult priorities than children's needs. Without detracting from the functions of a hospital yet recognising that hospitals can be frightening places for children, Barnardos feels it could be designed to be less institutional if the following factors are considered:

- Separate places for different activities – varied mini-spaces prevent boredom and disinterest. In a hospital context these different spaces must be designed to:
 - Ensure that older child patients / teenagers should not be on the same ward with much younger children.
 - Facilitate family support and private discussion between family and medical staff.
 - Recognise the importance of play in childhood and the positive benefits it has on child health. Play should be an integral part of a child's hospital stay.
- Varied textures, colours and forms – these finishes directly impact on how people feel and given that children are less cognitive and more sensory in their approach to the world it is important that variation in finishes be maintained.

¹ Theodore Wachs **The Development of Effective Child Care Environments: Contributions from the Study of Early Experience** Children's Environments Quarterly Vol 6, No. 4 1989

² Children in Hospital Ireland (1993) **Play for Child Patients in Irish Hospitals**,
www.childreninospital.ie

- Light – is the most important factor after food in controlling bodily functions and has a positive influence on health. Therefore fluorescent lighting should be replaced by full spectrum lighting. Also window heights should be lowered where possible to maximise natural daylight.

When designing the layout of the hospital the overall aim is to consider the aspects or features that will lead to a finished design which will allow children, who are vulnerable and who have no power in shaping their environments as much movement, comfort, competency and control as possible.

Policies and Procedures of the Hospital

In the roll out of the operations of the hospital, Barnardos recommends ensuring that all children attending the hospital are given a voice in matters affecting their own health. Being listened to, being heard and being given the opportunity to ask questions are of most importance to children. This is already in line with the National Children's Strategy and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 12).

The Coyne (2006)³ study found that while some children, particularly older children and those with more chronic conditions, did have a positive experience of being involved in consultation other child patients felt excluded and unprepared and were more fearful as a result.

To combat these feelings of disempowerment Barnardos recommends all staff should be trained in how best to engage and involve child patients in the diagnosis and treatment of their illnesses.

Conclusion

Being in hospital can be an overwhelming experience for children. To alleviate additional anxiety and helplessness the hospital layout and care must be child centred giving them feelings of comfort and empowerment at a difficult time in their young lives.

For further information please contact June Tinsley, Policy Officer on 7080440.

³ Coyne et al, (2006) *Giving Children a Voice*, Office of the Minister for Children