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Ralla Klepak Performing Arts Scholarship Essay

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Puppetry in Pediatrics

Health care professionals try to communicate with their patients as much as possible and ensure that their patient is aware of what is going on. This poses a difficulty when dealing with child patients because they are not as easy to speak to, and they sometimes do not give any responses at all. It is hard to truly understand their situation for them and for the health care provider to understand what they are going through. In addition it's unclear if telling the child about their condition is beneficial at all. Perhaps in some cases it would be better for a child to not know about certain aspects. It is really hard to tell with children because they often do not share things with the health care provider. Although as a general rule it often calms the patients when they are aware of what is going on (Martinez, Tocantins, and Souza 37).

When children are diagnosed with certain diseases that entail them regularly going to the hospital or doctor's office, it is very hard for them. It's hard for them in multiple ways. Going to hospitals might appear scary to them, their treatments might be painful, and they're not going to school consistently, like everyone else their age. It's really hard for children when their day to day routines are interrupted, it gives them this feeling of instability. One way that it's possible for the caretakers to help alleviate some of this fear is for them to ensure the child is aware of what's going on in terms of their

health condition and treatment plan, and to figure out how the child is feeling during this process. This poses a difficulty because it is usually hard for children to communicate via direct question and answers (Leite et al.) . There was a study done that tried to find out how children viewed the social roles of doctor and patient. After analyzing the children's role play, it became evident that the child did not understand the dynamic between physician and patient. Not only that, but it became clear that physicians need to understand the child's perception of healthcare to alleviate unnecessary anxiety and misinterpretation of professional motives or clinical procedures (Haight, Black, and DiMatteo 31). It makes perfect sense, just looking at any situation from a logical standpoint alone, knowing what is going to happen and why it is going to happen is a much more calming mental state than going into a situation unaware of what will happen and also afraid of the situation itself. The benefits of a child being calm is twofold. When a child is calmer it benefits himself because he has peace of mind, and it also is a benefit because now the health care professional can perform their part better. It is noteworthy to remark that children are usually calmer when their caretaker is nearby. A caretaker is always there, when circumstances allow it, because it is in everyone's best interest if a child is as calm as possible. In addition, if the nurse or other health care worker can form a bond with the child, then it will be that much easier to provide the child with the proper healthcare (Martinez, Tocantins, and Souza 37). Children are calm with the people they trust. Hence, it is important for the child to establish this bond with their healthcare provider. The key is being able to form this bond is determining the best way to communicate with the child. A person can not form a bond with another person without some form of a relationship, in order to have a good

relationship, a form of communicating is crucial. Sara Leah Lerman, a licensed social worker who practices in the field of play therapy, once said, "Everyone has their language, and a child's language is play."

In order to understand a child's language it is important to delve into the mechanics of play therapy. Play therapy is a very established option for the treatment of children in clinical practice. It is structured such that there is a room that is set up with many different toys, such as art and crafts, sand trays, musical instruments, and other materials in which to express themselves, such as puppets (Tilbrook). Different resources of play that can be used is photographs, drawing, therapeutic play, and puppets (Leite et al.). In play therapy, the child comes in and is welcomed into this world of play and predictable routines, which in turn creates this feeling that the space is a safe spot for them. The foundational principle of play therapy is that a child really wants to grow and discover their world and know themselves. The play room is not any other room because the rules in the playroom are different. The play room is specifically geared to encourage freedom of expression in a safe place through play. To play, children desire the feeling of safety. A child needs to trust the adult in charge of the session for the child to play freely and share their true emotions without any expectations or judgment. With all the prerequisite conditions to establish a safe environment fulfilled, a child may express his unconscious thoughts by conscious choices and actions. A child reveals things by picking one toy over the other, setting them up really rigid, bossing all the toys around, expressing himself through puppets. A popular tool amongst therapists for child expression is puppets (Tilbrook).

Puppets started off as a prop in entertainment. In 1905, the very first marionette theater was opened, whereupon puppets were used for the very first time to take you out of this world and into a world of your imagination. Today they are used for therapeutic relationships, entertainment, and are recommended for pediatric health care providers learn how to use them to interact with patients (Tilbrook). The use of puppets in healthcare would facilitate therapeutic, educational, medical, and diversional play (Tilbrook) . The really interesting thing about play is that it enables the child to be in the driver's seat of the situation. They feel in control. By using playful strategies, such as including puppets in the delivery process of nursing care, it really could enable genuine engagement of the child patients. Increased engagement, such as using distraction strategies, helps alleviate fear and anxiety and thereby helps make it an easier and more comfortable experience for both the child and his or her families. People learn by being engaged or by having fun. By creating this bridge between an emotion and knowledge, its possible to transport a person to a different time or memory they experienced. The idea of a real simulation with the health care professional hidden in a role, like in puppet simulation, can be considered something that creates a good lifelong memory. This could enable hospitalisation of children and healthcare provisions to be more of a nice, happy memory, as opposed to a sad and rather traumatic event (Tilbrook).

There was a study conducted about the effects of puppet mediated interviews with children in healthcare settings. The researcher of this study noted how much learning she experienced from watching Sesame Street, and it was the foundation for

her thoughts that using play and working with puppets are a great way to communicate with children in healthcare settings. Television proved that puppets were a great tool for enrapturing and educating children, and yet healthcare professionals specifically nurses and nurse educators, did not make it a normal thing to use in educating and getting the attention of children (Tilbrook). A puppet interview is a creative way to interview patients who would otherwise not be able to express certain things. It is also is beneficial because it offers the possibility to derive a therapy intervention. The study showed that parents may not really understand their child's perceptions on their disease correctly. It is really important for children to properly cope with their illness but they can not cope properly if no one knows in which way they are struggling. It is now possible to communicate with children about their illness through a puppet interview. It could possibly be used in the future as a tool to discover the reasons for a lack of cooperation in therapy and a lack of cooperation to take medication(Herzog et al.).

Using puppetry is a great communication strategy as it enables children to hear about their disease and treatment plans in a more comfortable way, as they are not making eye contact or speaking directly to the healthcare professional. It's helpful in many ways, it reduces the child's stress because the child understands more of what's going on, and motivates the child to learn about their disease. There was another study conducted that tested the effects of using puppets to communicate with child patients. There were six puppets: 3 animals, an elephant, an alligator, and a giraffe; two humans, one girl and one boy, and a big blob shape. Each puppet had a hinged mouth, which enables better communication. The patients were able to pick their own puppet, and they came in different sizes to ensure the patient felt the most comfortable. The

researcher also chose a puppet. The strategies used in the setup were designed to encourage greater interest among the patients. The interviews held in the study ranged from 7 to 32 minutes. The shorter interviews tended to have patients on the younger side due to their earlier stage in development. In every case, the use of puppets led to a longer interview. There were sixteen children in the study, ranging between the ages of seven and thirteen. Most of the participants were female, and the average years of schooling was three point six years. What researchers discovered in an interview mediated by puppets was that some children were coming to the hospital and receiving treatments, and they did not understand why. They also discovered that some children did know why they were there, the information being given to them from their parents. There was a range of children who knew they took medicine but did not know why, and others who did know and spoke about how it made them feel. It soon became clear that it was due to the actions of healthcare workers and the child's parents that children understood their diagnosis and treatment. Through puppet-mediated interviews, the children were able to express how alone they felt because of their disease. Children also expressed how they were too embarrassed to ask the doctors any questions, and how they also had felt hopeful by things the doctors had said. The researchers learnt so much about what the child was feeling throughout their treatment, how they felt at school, advice for other sick children, changes they would like in the hospital, and what they did not like about their treatments. At the end of each interview, every child wanted to continue playing with the puppets. The puppets really helped the children express their emotions(Leite et al.).

There was another study about the effects of puppetry in healthcare that was done at the pediatric oncology ward of a public teaching hospital in Brazil. The range of the ages of the children was seven to twelve years. They were all undergoing chemotherapy treatment for at least three months, and each child was able to speak in Portuguese. There were five boys and five girls who participated in this study. Before starting the process of data collection, each child met the researchers during a routine visit in the inpatient clinic, in which the entire study was explained in simple, understandable terms. The length of the interviews spanned from fifty-four to seventy-one minutes, and there was only one interview per child. The study was split into two steps: creating the finger puppets by the child, and then the child's interview using the puppet. During the interview, the children wore a colorful and fun customized apron with the goal of creating this playful and comfortable atmosphere. The apron had a few pockets with different pictures, one was a hospital, another an ambulance, and then there were two houses, and the child could interpret what building it was in whatever way they wanted. The researcher had made four puppets previously that the child could also play with. To warm up the children, they started off making a puppet that represented themselves. Finger puppets were specifically chosen as they can be made very fast and they fit in a smile placed like an apron, which would be easy to store in a hospital setting. Each child was interviewed by themselves, on the bed or at a desk. The results showed the benefits of using puppetry for research, as well as its setbacks. By using puppets, the children were able to express themselves, which enabled better communication. It is also a fun way for children to interact, and it allows them to be fully in control. The limitations are that someone qualified has to give the interview, and the

material used, data validity should also be taken into consideration. After some of the interviews, children wanted to continue playing, showing that they really engaged well with this type of activity. The puppets proved to be very effective for children who were not ready or who did not want to discuss their illness and what they were going through. One of the patients refused to talk about what he was going through, even in puppet therapy. It is really interesting to note that the children portrayed themselves in the puppets as they appeared before their illness and with features that differed from their real ones. This observation stresses the importance of the child being able to design their puppet in order to feel the most like themselves and comfortable throughout the interview. Also a lot of observations could be inferred and discovered based on how they represented themselves. A blonde child made his puppet brunette and stated that he did not like being blonde. A black child made a white puppet with a similar wig to her own. Also, some of the children identified the previously made puppets as other family members, which led to better communication with the children. The interviews were usually done during infusions, it led to interruptions by the nursing staff, but it was okay because the children jumped right back into the interview, which shows how deeply they really were enjoying it. It is truly fascinating the way that children interact. Children sometimes feel insecure about answering questions when they think that adults have a mastery of the subject, which is why through play, children express themselves more freely, specifically when dealing with difficult situations. Through the use of puppets, children share more sincere information about how they are feeling and their fears, etc., than they would if simply asked. People should be aware that sometimes children use the puppet to make up stories as a coping mechanism to escape reality. Also, it was

interesting to note that the children all gave their puppet hair, because they viewed their hair loss as well as their cancer as temporary, because they do not yet have the cognitive abilities to change the construction of their self-image. The use of the apron also furthered the child's free will capabilities as it allowed them another outlet to make decisions. Through the use of puppets, children were able to explain how they felt by detaching the emotions from themselves and expressing them through their puppets. This emphasizes the importance of a trained professional being the interviewer, as it is crucial for them to understand how to properly deal with the things being brought up by the children (Sposito et al.).

Another study was done with puppetry and children with type 1 diabetes. Children with type 1 diabetes: It's so important for children to understand their disease, and to understand a child's feelings and perceptions of that disease to ensure the child is doing their best to follow their treatment plans. Children share some information about their health experiences in simple interviews, but they do not share many details about their environment and the people they interact with. This study was conducted in three steps: constructing the stage, which was a fabric background, and the children drew pictures of people and items that were cut out and could be used wherever they chose on the stage; they then made the puppets; and then the children would play with the puppets. Through talking with puppets, children expressed their perception of what others had for them, and they expressed the difficulty they themselves experienced due to not being able to eat freely like their peers. One of the children expressed how they enjoyed the interview because they liked talking about it, and they liked being able to do so on their own terms freely (Sparapani et al.).

There are play therapists that are specifically trained and work in medical play settings. Unfortunately, such trained professionals are not available in all pediatric healthcare units, highlighting the need for those who are always present, such as the nurses to implement play therapy with children and their families (Leite et al.). The interviewer has to be trained to engage the child properly in order for the puppet mediated discussions in healthcare settings to be effective (Sparapani et al.).

The more children know about their disease, the more they will understand the importance of taking their medications and will thereby increase the likelihood of them taking it. Talking to the child about their disease can create co-responsibility in the child. Also, just the ability for the child to communicate how he or she is feeling is so crucial in that child care. Also, knowing which aspects of the hospital children do not like is important so that they can be modified to help the child have an easier time during this difficult process. Furthermore, the use of puppets helps create a bond between the health care provider and the patient (Leite et al.). Using puppets in healthcare is proving to be a great strategy to work with children, as it engages the child through play while simultaneously giving the child an education. Through the use of puppets, children have a way of communicating that they did not have before (Tilbrook et al. 73).

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