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What is Family-centered Care

The illness of a child can have a traumatic affect on both families and the child. Pediatric care has adopted the philosophy of a family-centered care approach in order to maximize the well being of pediatric patients. The philosophy is founded on the collaboration of the family, nurses and hospital staff to plan, provide, and evaluate care. The philosophy is grounded on several principles that revolve around the central idea that the family is the constant in a child's life (Neal et al., 2007). Nurses must work with the family to develop the best plan of care for a child. Parents are experts in their child's care and know more about their child than we can ever learn through assessments or charts. The family is also the child's main source of support providing stability in what can be an otherwise traumatic period in a child's life. The presence of the family during health related procedures can significantly reduce both the child's and parent's anxiety (Neff, 2003) Decreased anxiety from the patient and family decreases the stress on healthcare workers, positively affecting their ability to provide treatment. In essence the nurse must attend to both the needs of the family and child in order to maximize a child's outcomes.

Core Principles of Family-centered Care

Families come in all different shapes and sizes, and just like people, no two are alike. One role of the nurse is to acknowledge and honor diversity. Nurses are responsible for understanding the various influences of social, cultural, economic, and spiritual aspects of an individual's life. Spiritual and cultural beliefs can have a profound affect on a person's perceptions of well being. Nurses should work with the family so that these practices can be incorporated into a child's care if appropriate. A family that believes strongly in certain religious practices, such as prayer, may rely on them to cope with an event or put faith into their child's outcome. A patient's socioeconomic status can have a profound impact on the quality of care a child receives. The nurse has an obligation to find resources for the client and family in order to receive adequate

care such as referrals for community services or home care. Overall the nurse should help to tailor care in order meet the needs of the family and patient.

Before making a decisions regarding a child's care parents must be well informed. The role of the nurse involves the exchange of complete and unbiased information between the family and health care team (Hockenberry & Wilson, 2007). The family should be updated continuously about the child's condition and procedures. Keeping the parents well informed an including them in procedures can have a dramatic affect on decreasing their's and the child's stress. Studies are being conducted about the presence of a family in the room during procedures, even emergency resuscitation. The results have yielded better patient and family outcomes. Children have the added comfort of their parents' presence and parents are given the opportunity to witness procedures, reducing their questions and concerns. Once the family is properly informed the nurse can help to facilitate and support the family with decisions regarding care. Keeping open an honest communication between the family and hospital staff improves the family's emotional state and enhanced the staff's ability to treat the patient.

The most important task of the nurse is to provide support to the family. There are two key components of support, these are enabling and empowerment. Enabling refers to providing opportunities for the family to display their current skills while learning and acquiring new skills. Empowerment refers to the ability of the healthcare team to allow families to acquire a sense of control over their family's lives (Hockenberry & Wilson, 2007). To achieve this the nurse should first recognize a family's strengths and help the family to build on them. Simply reassuring the parent that they know what is best for their child, and encouraging them to make decisions based on what they believe is best can give help them regain a sense of control. Encouragement can help a parent feel more confident in a time of uncertainty. Parents also need support in these difficult times, and the nurse should assess their coping abilities and emotional state. Referring parents to a parent to parent support group may aid in their coping and allow them to discuss concerns with other parents in similar circumstances. The

nurse can provide support and confidence for a family to learn new skills and make critical decisions.

The Benefits of Family-Centered Care

There are many benefits associated with the practice of family-centered care. Nurses should not only establish rapport with the patient but also with the family. This allows for optimal collaboration and collaborating with the family maximizes each child's growth and well being. Working together parents and health care workers can make more personal and informed decisions regarding what the best treatment is for a child. Parents also receive support and encouragement that the old philosophy of care neglected. Supporting a parent in coping with their child's illness allows them to provide better care for their child and enhances the stability of a parent child relationship. The nurse has a greater understanding of the family's capabilities and strengths allowing the nurse to further build upon and enhance those skills ensuring the patient is provided the best care even after discharge. Together the family, nurse, and healthcare staff are empowered to provide the most optimal care for a child.

Recent Research

A recent movement towards implementing the family-centered care approach leads to the further study of its benefits. An article published by the American Academy of Pediatrics supports that parents and children suffer less when the family is included in the patients care. Children were found to have cried less, require less medicine, be less restless, and even experience earlier discharge when the family was present during most aspects of care. Others studies show that parents who receive specialized care and one to one support do significantly better in handling and coping with stress during adjustment periods. It is no wonder then that many health care practices are reviewing and improving their guidelines for family-centered care (Neff, 2003)

Implications to Nursing Practice

As students we are taught continuously to develop a trusting relationship with our patients. In the pediatric setting nurses have the additional responsibility of establishing a relationship with the family. Children are special patients and

require a unique delivery of care that includes treating the family as a whole. The family-centered care philosophy can enhance patient and family satisfaction, build on their strengths, patient and family outcome, increase the nurse and healthcare staff's satisfaction, and decrease healthcare costs. Most of all research has proven that patient and family outcomes are improved. As nurses we should remember to appreciate the family and their children for who they are, and embrace their differences. We are their advocates, and our responsibility is to do what is best for the child.

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