



Royal College
of Nursing



Children and young people's nursing: a philosophy of care

Guidance for nursing staff



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Originally published in 1991, this philosophy has been updated and amended by the Royal College of Nursing's (RCN) Children and Young People's Field of Practice. The principles and commitments set out in this document form the basis of all RCN policies relating to the care of children and young people.

Introduction

Encompassing a range of forums and groups, the RCN Children and Young People's Field of Practice is:

- ◆ a focus for RCN members interested in the nursing of children and young people, providing them with networks and opportunities for support, advice and professional development
- ◆ a voice for children's nursing within the RCN and for nursing within the world of child health
- ◆ developing the art and science of children's nursing and its specialties.

Children and young people's nursing practice is underpinned by beliefs that are based upon the nature of the child or young person and their status and rights within both the family and society. In addition to

recognising the RCN's definition of nursing¹, the field of practice believes that the nurse's primary focus is to assist the child or young person and their family to prevent or manage the physiological, physical, social, psychological and spiritual effects of a health problem or condition and its treatment. To a lesser or greater degree, depending on the context, the role may encompass:

- ◆ health promotion
- ◆ investigation
- ◆ diagnosis and treatment of medical conditions
- ◆ counselling
- ◆ childcare
- ◆ other interventions and therapies.

The needs of the child or young person as an individual

Whilst recognising the individual needs of each child or young person, the RCN field of practice:

- ◆ acknowledges the impact of inequalities in current health service and social care provision and the effect of the inter-relationships between social, physical and political environmental factors upon the health and well-being of children and young people
- ◆ promotes the recognition of the distinct needs of children and young people across all health care settings. This includes the need for: access to education, health promotion and collaborative working between health service providers, social care and education to ensure seamless care, particularly during the transition to adult service provision.

Nurses caring for children and young people should:

- ◆ listen to children and young people, providing a means for them to convey their opinions and feelings and using these to guide decisions about the way health care is delivered
- ◆ promote and protect the individual rights of children and young people in

all settings where they receive care and treatment. This includes being cared for in a culturally sensitive environment; and ensuring privacy and confidentiality during all episodes of care^{2,3}

- ◆ recognise each child or young person as a unique individual whose best interests must be paramount, whilst considering their physical, psychological, social, cultural and spiritual needs, as well as those of their families
- ◆ respect the right of children, according to their age and understanding, to appropriate information, facilitating informed participation in decisions about their health care.

The child or young person in the family

In caring for children and young people, nurses should:

- ◆ recognise and use the knowledge and caring experience of parents or carers in all aspects of their child's health care
- ◆ facilitate a reciprocal relationship with the family, within which children, young people and families are able to determine the level of participation they desire at any one time unless, in exceptional circumstances, this is not in the best interests of the child or young person.
- ◆ recognise and respect differences within and between families in the amount they wish or are able to be involved in

their child's care, whilst recognising that effective health care is fully negotiated with the child or young person and their family

- ◆ promote the rights of children and young people to be accompanied by a familiar and trusted person - usually parents or carers - in any environment where care is delivered
- ◆ ensure sufficient information, education and support is provided to promote and enable active participation and consultation with children, young people and their families in all aspects of health care provision and decision-making
- ◆ inform the child or young person and their family of the different roles and responsibilities of members of the health care team
- ◆ seek feedback, suggestions and views via user surveys to minimise complaints, developing policies collaboratively with children, young people, parents and carers
- ◆ ensure procedures for managing complaints are child-friendly, clearly communicated and regularly updated
- ◆ respect and value cultural and religious diversity within and between family groups.

Nursing services for children, young people and their families

The RCN Children and Young People's Field of Practice:

- ◆ endorses the need for a named professional, who has children and young people's health service experience and expertise, to be responsible for commissioning services at local level. Further, we support the Kennedy⁴ recommendations for a lead executive on every policy-making body. The latter person should have a remit for overseeing the strategic development of services for children, with responsibility to implement the principles outlined in this philosophy
- ◆ supports the work of the government minister responsible for children and young people in each of the countries of the UK, and the Children's and Young People's Unit. In addition, we continue to campaign for a children's commissioner in all four countries of the UK, with a lead director at national level in each country who is responsible for children and young people's health services
- ◆ campaigns for accessibility and equity of health care provision for all children and young people, and the implementation of national standards to meet their specific needs

- ◆ supports the view that the child or young person's needs should be paramount in the development of services, rather than professional roles or boundaries
- ◆ promotes the provision of services that are child and young person-orientated. Facilities should be designed to meet the specific needs of children and young people and they should be involved in the planning and development of future services
- ◆ campaigns for the collection of national and local data on health care interventions and outcomes to guide future children and young people's health care service provision. This should incorporate the views of children, young people, parents and professionals
- ◆ embraces the development of comprehensive, integrated, multi-agency child health services to provide seamless care across organisational boundaries
- ◆ promotes collaborative and integrated working between services for children, young people and adults to ensure a smooth transition between health care providers
- ◆ asserts the right of children and young people in all settings to be cared for by appropriately qualified and registered nursing staff, who have received specific training to meet their needs. The levels and skill-mix of staff should reflect the specific needs of children and young people and their families
- ◆ maintains that the environment of care should reflect the psychosocial and developmental needs of children and young people, in terms of play, recreational facilities and educational provision. There should be specific provision for those with special needs
- ◆ promotes the role of children's nurses within primary care organisations. They should work alongside children and young people's public health nurses[†] to provide a comprehensive community health care service, reducing unnecessary in-patient admissions and hospital attendance
- ◆ focuses on health promotion to minimise lifestyle factors that may compromise the health and well-being of children and young people
- ◆ reinforces the role of all nurses in safeguarding and protecting children and young people.

Developing and maintaining clinical competence

The RCN Children and Young People's Field of Practice:

- ◆ believes that nurses have a right to be supported and able to access professional leadership at local level. They should receive the appropriate education to undertake their role in

[†] Including school nurses and health visitors

- providing holistic care for children, young people and their families
- ◆ encourages effective communication to share and develop the evidence base for practice
- ◆ offers nurses access to the range of knowledge and skills needed to work in dynamic health services
- ◆ promotes the need for continuing professional development and specific post-registration education and training opportunities for nurses working with this client group. This includes specific provision regarding the protection of children and young people
- ◆ enhances reciprocal exchanges, both within the RCN and other relevant professional bodies, to ensure there is a broad perspective in all aspects of work.

Supporting evidence and information

Governments, professional and voluntary bodies have produced a wealth of policy statements, reports and recommendations about children's and young people's health services. The RCN Children's and Young People's Field of Practice strives to continuously influence and shape policy development, whilst also lobbying for the full implementation of guidance recommendations. Lists of key documents which are endorsed or fully supported by the RCN Children's and Young People's

Field of Practice can be obtained from RCN Direct on 0845 772 6100. Separate lists relate to documents in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and include RCN guidance and other policy documents such as:

Scottish Executive (2000) *Protecting children, a shared responsibility – guidance for health professionals in Scotland. NHS MEL 5*, ISBN 0 7480 8272 7v

Scottish Office (1998) *The Scottish Office NHS policies for children – 1974-1998*. An overview. Available at www.scotland.gov.uk/library/documents6/chilpol-00.htm

Carlile Review (2002) *Too serious a thing*. Copies can be obtained from the National Assembly for Wales. Telephone 02920 823480 or access at www.wales.gov.uk

Nursing services for the acutely ill child (1999) Belfast DHSS

Health Select Committee (1996/97) *Hospital services for children and young people*. Fifth report of session 1996/97. Volume 1: Report, together with the proceedings of the committee paper 128-1. London: The Stationery Office

Department of Health (2001) *Health visitor and school nurse development programme resource packs*. Available from the NHS Response line, telephone 08701 555 455 or access at www.innovate.had.online.org.uk, or email doh@prolog.uk.com

Hogg C (1996) *Health services for children and young people: a guide for commissioners and providers*. London: Action for Sick Children

Royal College of Nursing (1999) *Skill mix and staffing in children's wards and departments*. London: RCN. Available from RCN Direct on 0845 772 6100, quote publication code 001 054

The RCN fully supports those members who seek to raise concerns about the care of children and young people or the protection of their rights. For specific advice, contact RCN Direct on: 0845 772 6100 or your local RCN office – see your *RCN members' guide to services and benefits* for contact details.

References

- 1 Royal College of Nursing (2003) *Defining nursing*. London: RCN. Publication code: 001 998, can also be downloaded at www.rcn.org.uk
- 2 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) 20. Xi. 1989; TS 44; Cm 1976
- 3 The Resolution of the European Parliament on a Charter for Children in Hospital (1986)
- 4 BRI Inquiry (2001) *The Report of the Public Inquiry into Children's Heart Surgery at the Bristol Royal Infirmary 1984-1995: Learning from Bristol*. London: The Stationery Office.

The term 'child' refers to any individual from birth through infancy (including neonates), childhood and adolescence, recognising the particular needs of specific ages, particularly the transition period to adulthood. The 'family' refers to the child or young person's significant carer(s), as defined by the individual and/or their parent(s)/carer(s)/legal guardian(s).



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