A paediatric day-case unit: better care at lower cost

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The authors outline benefits deriving from the establishment of a paediatric day-case unit in a Saudi Arabian hospital.

In 1989 a paediatric day-case unit was established in Saudi Arabia’s North West Armed Forces Hospital, which provides care for military personnel and their dependants. The unit functions five days a week from 8:00 to 17:00 and admits patients referred by physicians and surgeons. Its staff have no other duties.

Between August 1989 and July 1993, total annual admissions increased from 499 to 600; an increase in surgical admissions from 4 to 77 was largely attributable to the arrival of a paediatric surgeon during the last year of the period under consideration. Many patients were admitted more than once, particularly for transfusions and chemotherapy. The patients’ ages ranged from 1 week to 12 years, the average being about 6 years.

Very few children were transferred from the unit to the wards of the hospital as inpatients. Most transfers involved oncology patients who were found to be febrile and were therefore screened for sepsis and given antimicrobial therapy and barrier nursing before chemotherapy was undertaken. Only four children had to be retained in the general ward for prolonged observation following investigatory or surgical procedures.

Admissions to the unit were in the following categories.

- Medical:
  - for continuing treatment, including chemotherapy, infusions and transfusions;
  - for preparation/sedation ahead of specialized procedures;
  - for investigation, e.g., into growth hormone response.

- Surgical:
  - for minor surgical procedures, e.g., repair of hernia;
  - for ophthalmological procedures;
  - for ear, nose and throat procedures;
  - for dental procedures;
  - for miscellaneous procedures, e.g., removal of plaster casts.

The patients admitted to the unit came from a wide range of specialties. Case selection was fairly good, as is evident from the small number of transfers to general wards. In order to provide consistent coverage the present nursing staff of one should be increased.

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The average daily cost per patient in the day-case unit was approximately half that for an inpatient. The cost-effectiveness of day-case units has been demonstrated in previous studies (1–3). Day surgery offers the prospect of saving resources and of reducing the adverse consequences associated with the hospitalization of children. However, stringent monitoring is essential to ensure that care is maintained at a high level. It is important, for instance, that parents and children be properly prepared for admission, and that good after-care be provided.

Day-case units can be highly effective and have the advantages of reduced separation of children from their parents, reduced cost, and reduced nosocomial infection. If properly planned an expansion of this approach to health care in developing countries would undoubtedly be beneficial, just as it has been in the developed world.

References

Discouraging young people from smoking

It is difficult to motivate young people to avoid a practice having harmful effects that become apparent only many years later. Rational arguments have not been sufficiently effective in discouraging young people from smoking. A combination of various strategies is called for, and legislation may play an essential role by banning sales to minors, prohibiting smoking in schools and other places where young people gather, and creating a smoke-free environment.