

The importance of ludic for hospitalized children

La importancia del lúdico para los niños hospitalizados

A importância do lúdico para crianças hospitalizadas

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Abstract

This work aims to reflect on the importance of playfulness for children within the hospital environment, considering that hospitalization is a new situation, which generates anxiety and brings difficulties and harm to the child's development. Playing is a right for every child, even those who are hospitalized. This work is a reflective study of a critical-descriptive nature. The survey of articles related to this topic was carried out through research in the following databases: LILACS, Google Scholar, SciELO, and books. The descriptors used were: "Hospitalization", "Child", "Playful", "Games", "Play" and "Child's Health". The inclusion criteria for selecting the studies were: being an article, available online, full, and free text, published in Portuguese, and books available at Faculdade Uneouro de Ouro Preto do Oeste - RO. We conclude that play in the hospital environment leaves the child less stressed, distressed and more understanding, and is also a form of rapprochement between the family, the patient and the professional, a bond of trust, in which health professionals can understand the patient.

Descriptors: Hospitalization; Child; Ludic; Games and Games; Children's Health.

Resumén

El objetivo de este trabajo es reflexionar sobre la importancia de la lúdica para los niños dentro del ambiente hospitalario, considerando que la hospitalización es una situación nueva, que genera ansiedad y trae dificultades y perjuicios para el desarrollo del niño. Jugar es un derecho de todos los niños, incluso de los hospitalizados. Este trabajo es un estudio reflexivo de carácter crítico-descriptivo. El levantamiento de artículos relacionados con este tema se realizó a través de búsquedas en las siguientes bases de datos: LILACS, Google Scholar, SciELO y libros. Los descriptores utilizados fueron: "Hospitalización", "Niño", "Lúdico", "Juegos", "Juego" y "Salud del Niño". Los criterios de inclusión para la selección de los estudios fueron: ser un artículo, disponible en línea, texto completo y libre, publicado en portugués y en libros disponibles en la Faculdade Uneouro de Ouro Preto do Oeste - RO. Concluimos que el juego en el ambiente hospitalario deja al niño menos estresado, angustiado y más comprensivo, y es también una forma de acercamiento entre la familia, el paciente y el profesional, un vínculo de confianza, en el que los profesionales de la salud pueden comprender al paciente.

Descriptores: Hospitalización; Niño; Lúdico; Juegos y Juegos; Salud Infantil.

Resumo

O objetivo deste trabalho é refletir sobre a importância da ludicidade à criança dentro do ambiente hospitalar, considerando que a hospitalização é uma situação nova, que gera ansiedade e que traz dificuldades e prejuízos para o desenvolvimento da criança. Brincar é um direito de toda criança, mesmo aquelas que se encontram hospitalizadas. Esse trabalho trata-se de um estudo reflexivo de caráter crítico-descriptivo. O levantamento de artigos relacionados à essa temática foi realizado em pesquisa nas bases: LILACS, Google Acadêmico, SciELO e livros. Os descritores utilizados foram: "Hospitalização", "Criança", "Lúdico", "Jogos", "Brincadeiras" e "Saúde da Criança". Os critérios de inclusão para a seleção dos estudos foram: ser artigo, disponível on-line, texto completo e gratuito, divulgado em língua portuguesa e em livros disponíveis na Faculdade Uneouro de Ouro Preto do Oeste - RO. Concluímos que o lúdico no ambiente hospitalar deixa a criança menos estressada, angustiada e mais compreensiva, sendo também uma forma de aproximação entre família, o paciente e o profissional, um elo de confiança, na qual os profissionais de saúde conseguem entender o paciente.

Descritores: Hospitalização; Criança; Lúdico; Jogos e Brincadeiras; Saúde da Criança.



Introduction

Hospitalization in childhood can be characterized as a traumatic experience. It distances the child from their daily life and family environment, promoting a confrontation with pain, physical limitations, and passivity, awakening feelings of guilt, punishment, and fear of death. The possibility of carrying out recreational activities in the hospital environment can serve as a way of mediating between family routines and new routines linked to hospitalization and overcoming the barriers generated by illness¹.

Many children cannot enjoy the right to play, they lose this right in the early years of their childhood, for a variety of reasons, be it a disability, being hospitalized, or having to start working in childhood to help their families².

The psychological consequences of hospitalization are multiple: sleep problems, behavior problems, appetite problems, and school difficulties. A sick child remains a child and, to guarantee their emotional and intellectual balance, play is essential. Children who are unable to play have their development compromised and their emotional balance disturbed³.

The problem justifying this research is based on the benefits that play provides to children during their stay in the hospital and the importance of play for children within the hospital environment. When hospitalized, children begin to live with some restrictions due to treatments and days spent in the hospital, which end up compromising their development. Added to this is the need to adapt to new schedules interact with unknown people and deal with the disease itself.

The playful activities provided to these children in the hospital environment act as catalysts in the process of their recovery and adaptation, representing a strategy for confronting the adverse conditions of hospitalization. Playing allows the child to feel better in their daily lives during hospitalization and to recover the games they played in their family environment before hospitalization. The hospital environment becomes more humanized, which favors the quality of life of these children and their families, thus influencing their recovery⁴.

Playing has been part of people's lives since childhood, and from this perspective it can be said that playing is important for the child's overall development, being related to aspects of cognitive, social, affective, and physical development⁵. Play in other aspects can also help children express their aggression, maintain control over their anguish, increase their experiences, train for immediate and future situations, as well as promote the establishment of social contacts⁶. In this way, play can be used by parents, and health and education professionals as a means of stimulating children's development and learning⁷.

Playfulness is a significant tool for dealing with issues such as comprehensive care; treatment adherence; the establishment of channels that facilitate communication between child-health professionals; maintenance of children's rights, and the significance of the disease on the part of patients and their families. For the nurse, the child he plays with stops being a "medical record" and becomes a person, with feelings and needs, that must be met, so that

the disease can be faced and overcome in the best possible way⁸.

Hospitalization changes a child's life, as they are separated from their family, friends, school, home, and personal belongings and they suffer as a result. Therefore, the hospital environment should not seem hostile, cold, and threatening, as this will harm the child in their development, as well as in their treatment. To facilitate the child's adaptation to the hospitalization situation, they must receive adequate care and stimulation, so that their life does not come to a halt because of their hospitalization. To achieve this, the child mustn't be separated from their parents and family, they receive affection and attention from them, as well as from the healthcare team, and they can be encouraged to play and talk about the experience they are living, their fears, your fantasies and your expectations⁹.

Thus, this article aimed to reflect on the importance of playfulness for children within the hospital environment, considering that hospitalization is a new situation, which generates anxiety and brings difficulties and harm to the child's development.

Methodology

This is a reflective study of a critical-descriptive nature. The survey of articles related to the theme exposed here was carried out in research in the following databases: LILACS, Google Scholar, SciELO, and books.

The inclusion criteria for selecting the study were: being an article, available online, full and free text, on pre-established bases, published in Portuguese, and books available at Faculdade Uneuro de Ouro Preto do Oeste – RO.

The descriptors used were: "Hospitalization", "Child", "Playful", "Games", "Play" and "Child's Health". The research was carried out from February 2020 to March 2022.

Results and Discussion

To carry out this work, after searching with the selected descriptors, 89 publications were identified and, after eligibility, in the screening, the final sample was 29 articles and 17 books available for consultation in the library of Faculdade Uneuro de Ouro Preto do Oeste – RO.

The use of toys, in child hospitalization situations, is one of the resources that facilitate the hospitalization experience. In addition to making the child have a little fun and live like the child they are, through play, the professionals who accompany them could receive information about the needs, fears, and anxieties that the child may be experiencing. Through this work, we seek to show how much the situation of child hospitalization deserves special care and attention so that it does not cause harm to the child⁹.

When a person is hospitalized, their recovery depends on their own involvement in the recovery process and this is not an easy task, given that they are weakened, outside their home environment and routines that are peculiar to them. To facilitate the patient's recovery, the



healthcare team needs to humanize care and the use of playful techniques has offered satisfactory results¹⁰.

The play thus becomes a powerful working instrument, especially for nursing, in the restoration of human health¹¹.

Aspects of intervention in the hospital environment are discussed by the author¹², who advocates the creation of mechanisms that promote a healthy environment and sees playing as a possible strategy for coping with stressful conditions and as a resource that can be used by both children and professionals to deal with the adversities of the illness process. The playful nature of these interventions makes the statements come true. Playfulness allows the child to create imaginary situations that enable them to better cope with the difficult situation experienced at that time by the hospitalized student¹³.

It can be said, then, that play, in general, is everything that provokes emotion, joy, spirituality, and pleasure. Educational games, dramatizations, parties, celebrations, recreation, or fun and other activities that provide moments of lighter, relaxation, joy, fun, vitality, enjoyment, victories and defeats, discoveries, creation, new knowledge, new experiences, and new movements are ways to experience playfulness. As the human being is unique, each of the emotions he experiences will also be unique, whether he experiences play in an active or passive way¹⁴.

Playful activities

The main scholars of childhood, such as Freud, Piaget, Vygotsky, and Winnicott, emphasized the importance of playful activities in children's lives, as they have a symbolic and functional dimension, favoring the development of imagination and creativity. Through play, children express their internal reality, relieving themselves of their anxieties and carrying out daily activities in a healthy way, even when they must go through painful experiences, such as illness and hospitalization¹⁵.

The use of playful activities in the hospital environment began in 1986, when a clown from New York's Big Apple Circus, named Michael Christensen, performed at the city's main hospital and, in the end, asked to visit the children who had not attended, because they cannot get out of bed. The clown did some improvisations, making the children very happy. This presentation gave rise to the Clown Care Unit group, the first to be trained to bring joy to patients at the New York hospital¹⁶.

The act of playing, for Vygotsky¹⁷, creates the so-called "zone of proximal development", which pushes the child beyond the stage of development they have already reached. When playing, the child performs beyond what is expected for their age and beyond their usual behavior. Through play, children free themselves from the limitations of their real world, as they create imaginary situations. Furthermore, it is an essentially social symbolic action, which depends on the expectations and conventions present in the culture.

Another aspect related to play is related to the creation dimension. In this context, author¹⁸ emphasizes that more important than the object used is how it is used

and the relationship that is established, with emphasis on the meaning of the experience for the child, as through play they learn to transform and use objects, while he invests and "colors" them according to his subjectivity and fantasies. Thus, it is clear why an old, sometimes damaged, toy is often more important to a child than a new toy. Therefore, the meanings present in the toy maintain the child's attractiveness.

Given this, it is evident that play becomes essential for the child's development and, therefore, the appropriate space and time must be made available for them to play, thus contributing to their healthy development. On the other hand, it is also essential that adults recover their ability to play so that they can make themselves available to children as partners and encouragers in the act of playing¹⁹.

Hospitalization

Hospitalization in childhood can be characterized as a traumatic action for the child. The child is a complete human being at each stage of their development, who has a body, mind, feelings, spirituality, and, therefore, a value of their own. The child must be respected and treated as a person, a unique, competent being, with potential, in the process of development and a being of relationships. The hospitalized child remains a person and a citizen. Hospitalization is one of the greatest sources of anxiety for children, both for themselves and for their family⁹.

Nursing is the part of the multidisciplinary team that interacts most with patients, and in the case of children, they play a fundamental role during hospitalization.

There are several factors inherent to hospitalization that bring harmful consequences and serious emotional problems adverse to the development of hospitalized and sick children. Among others, we have aggressive weaning, disruption of family life, interruption or delay in schooling, and the rhythm of life and development. However, the greatest harm that hospitalization brings refers to the separation of the sick child from his mother, an aspect that has already been assumed and widespread in pediatric illnesses, as it is in a time of crisis, determined by the disease that the child needs maternal support and affection²⁰.

Many family members report that they feel devalued in the hospital environment when they play the role of companion for the child, being invisible to the eyes of the team, which makes them feel excluded from the care of their family member and creates a climate of distrust between the healthcare team and the companion²¹.

The presence of a family member during hospitalization is one of the most important measures to be taken to reduce the child's anxiety, however, it is necessary that this family member can benefit from an appropriate environment, in addition to having contact with professionals who support and guide. The attitudes of professionals involved in childcare will be crucial for this experience to happen in the best way possible. The first criterion that the professional must have to acquire this attitude is to believe that the presence of the parents is important for the child's well-being. Another point is to ensure that parents and children receive clear and specific



instructions about what they can and should do, at what times, places, and conditions, as well as what they can expect from each professional²².

The professional needs to know how to communicate with the child appropriately and in a language that is appropriate to their level of development. In addition to having good preparation in empathetic and assertive strategies that allow you to understand and respond appropriately to parents who are in situations of great tension, anxiety, doubt, and fear.

In childhood, hospitalization is a potentially traumatic experience. When hospitalized, the child is removed from their natural environment and exposed to confrontation with pain and suffering, as well as physical limitations and passivity, thus emerging feelings of guilt, punishment, and fear of death. It may present difficulties in dealing with such circumstances when it fails to participate in the scenario and conditions favorable to the continuity of its development²³.

When a child goes through hospitalization, they need incentives and interventions that allow them to face the situation in a lighter, calmer, less painful way, as this way their health will recover faster, and treatment will be easier.

Considering that playing is a playful instrument that mediates the child's relationship with the world and influences how they relate and interact, it presents itself as a comprehensive care strategy for hospitalized children, giving this special being the opportunity to let their way shine through. of being in the world, which allows professionals to consider their uniqueness in the process of illness and hospitalization, as well as offering this child the opportunity to express their hidden feelings, consequently supporting the construction of strategies to deal with the events²⁴.

The participation of hospitalized children in activities that involve playing can also accelerate their recovery, contributing to reducing the length of stay in the hospital and, consequently, the cost of hospitalization²⁵.

For younger and immature children, the explanation of the disease or treatments must be simple and brief, with a clear perceptual basis, focused on the most important phenomena and sensations. It is necessary to pay great attention to language, as children tend to interpret literally what is said to them and focus on images of concrete and material attacks on their physical integrity²².

Sensations should be reported in a way to avoid surprise, but not to anticipate pain or anxiety. With an older child, there can, and should, be more detailed and realistic information, as the child is already capable of taking on the challenge that "hurts a little", but their enormous bravery and competence will help them to win that test. The procedural explanation of getting sick and healing, the idea that positive thoughts can overcome ideas of fear, can interest the child, and motivate them to participate more actively and positively in their treatment.

In addition to the difficulties that the disease itself brings, hospitalization conditions can affect the entire child, such that their physical, emotional, and intellectual development is compromised.

When dealing with a clientele whose life routine is disrupted by the disease and the processes inserted in this context, playing appears as a possibility of organizing this chaos¹.

From this perspective, play becomes an interesting instrument to work on exactly what is not said or cannot be said in the treatment. The possible tensions and discomforts generated in these environments can be alleviated through play, which plays a supportive role in the care and attention to the child's health, allowing the service to be viewed in a more welcoming manner¹⁵.

The playful space is located between reality and fantasy. It is an intrinsic condition in the subject's life and an essential element for maintaining health, providing support that can contribute to the good development of the health/disease process, especially when the disease is chronic and can lead to emotional, behavioral, and social maladjustments²⁶.

Among the possible strategies used by children to face the hospitalization process are playing and reading, these practices being typical of their moment in life, in which they discover, experiment, invent, exercise, and check their skills, in addition, to stimulated creativity, initiative and self-confidence, actions that are always present in projects implemented by the interdisciplinary team²⁷.

This need for fun is confirmed by the author²⁸, when he says that, when playing, children fantasize, suppose, imitate, and create plots that help them understand the world. The encounter between the external (shared) world and the internal world (of ideas, desires, and imagination) is frequent, and, consequently, the richer in internal resources the child is, the greater chance of success in resolving these encounters they will have.

For authors²⁹, through playing it is possible to diagnose pathologies in children, as well as identify illnesses and verify the child's healthy characteristics and difficulties. In this context, it is highlighted that playing can contribute as a valuable instrument regarding the observation and care of the psychoanalyst, as children's experiences are full of meanings³⁰.

Multidisciplinary team

Nurses, doctors, psychologists, physiotherapists, and nutritionists, among others, are part of the multidisciplinary team, which is made up of professionals from different areas of health, who work as a team, assisting in the patient's recovery³¹.

For the introduction of playfulness in the hospital environment to offer good results, the multidisciplinary team that cares for hospitalized children must have a spirit of play, considering it a vital necessity in the process of illness and treatment. Teamwork stands out as an intervention model, in which the exchange of professional knowledge takes place in a productive and defined way. In this sense, it is important that these professionals, who care for children in hospitals, work as a team, precisely by exchanging professional knowledge, as well as improving these interpersonal relationships, contributing more fully to the patient's recovery³².



Authors³³ explain that the lack of bond between the healthcare team and the patient can harm the child's development. The authors point out that children are not capable of learning things on their own, and therefore depend on the mediation of other people and interaction with objects, which demonstrates that human beings only develop within a social group.

The use of play in pediatrics is suggested in the Classification of Nursing Interventions, which addresses the diagnosis and treatment of respiratory disorders in children, recommending the use of toys and playing to stimulate breathing and facilitate treatment. To do this, the professional needs to know the motor capacity of the hospitalized child, as well as the best use of the toy or game. The work must be multidisciplinary and interprofessional so that the therapeutic function of play is achieved. Professionals who use it need to have creativity, patience, persistence, goodwill, tranquility, security, and affection³⁴.

The nurse, as a member of the team that cares for hospitalized children, must offer humanized assistance, of which play can be a part, providing a better quality of life for the young patient and their family members. The nurse who lives with the child becomes part of their daily lives and they expect the professional to be affectionate, trustworthy, and have a sense of humor. These qualities, expressed through playful activities, which distract the child from the pain of treatment, encourage them to mobilize strength to recover their health in a shorter period of time⁸.

The way the healthcare team carries out its work in the hospital, how the team is formed, whether they are professionals trained to deal with children and whether they can view patients as human beings or just carriers of diseases, is another important factor to consider. Consider when discussing the harmful consequences caused by hospitalization²⁰.

Therefore, it is worth noting that the professional - toy - child triad interconnects purposes and expectations, facilitating positive interaction, with toys being predominantly the relevant tool for humanized intervention, promoting movement between - the real and imaginary world - overcoming the barriers of illness. Involvement in the therapeutic process is necessary, minimizing the anguish of the child and family, prioritizing the child's universe, and maximizing the potential of affection, love, and desire to be the child's companion in the lived experience.³⁵

Integration between members of the hospital team helps the child to perceive uniformity of actions, a fundamental aspect in preventing emotional maladjustments that may manifest themselves during and/or after a hospital experience. The hospital team must act in an integrated manner, seeking continuity and consistency. Service presupposes a constant exchange of information between components so that decisions, conduct, and interventions are defined within this scope³⁶⁻³⁸.

The importance of playing

The perception of parents and children about the commitment and integration of the hospital team directly influences the team-family relationship, an essential

condition for the healing process. In the hospital, parents may also feel safer if they know that their child's emotional needs are being addressed, as well as their medical needs³⁹.

Author³⁰ described that learning is more effective when it is fun. Thus, learning concepts related to illness and hospitalization can be more easily worked on with the inclusion of playful activities in the hospital.

Playing is considered one of the strategies that facilitate children's adaptation to the condition of hospitalization, allowing them to express their feelings, and providing an improvement in their repertoire of coping with this condition. Children learn, through playing, about their world and how to deal with this environment (of objects, time, space, structure, and people)⁴⁰. The importance of playing in the hospital situation gained social relevance mainly from the work of the doctor Patch Adams (1999), in the United States of America, whose personal story was popularized through a film⁴¹.

In this situation, the child needs resources that allow him to face the phase he is going through. These resources bring her as close as possible to her life outside the hospital, where she can express her feelings and be close to people, and the suffering of this child, due to hospitalization, is minimized³³.

It can be said, then, that play, in general, is everything that provokes emotion, joy, spirituality, and pleasure. Educational games, dramatizations, parties, celebrations, recreation, or fun and other activities that provide moments of lighter, relaxation, joy, fun, vitality, enjoyment, victories and defeats, discoveries, creation, new knowledge, new experiences, and new movements are ways to experience the fun. As the human being is unique, each of the emotions he experiences will also be unique, whether he experiences play in an active or passive way¹⁴.

Vygotsky^{17:106} states that "[...] it is impossible to ignore that the child satisfies certain needs in toys". If we do not understand the special character of these needs, we cannot understand uniqueness as a form of activity".

Furthermore, he adds in his theory that it is "[...] in toys that the child learns to act in a cognitive sphere, rather than in an external visual sphere, depending on internal motivations and tendencies, and not on the incentives provided by external objects". The author, making a distinction between play and other children's activities, states that in the first there are rules and imagination, both implicitly and explicitly^{17:126}.

Games and fun

In general, games have been part of our lives since ancient times, being present not only in childhood but also at other times. Games can be efficient instructional tools, as they entertain while motivating, facilitate learning, and increase the ability to retain what has been taught, exercising the player's mental and intellectual functions⁴².

Games have always been an essential form of activity for human beings. Among primitive people, for example, the activities of dancing, hunting, fishing, and fighting were seen as survival activities, often going beyond



the restricted nature of fun and natural pleasure. Children, in games, participated in technical and magical endeavors⁴³.

Toys and playing are considered facilitators in treatments carried out in pediatrics. In the case of children with respiratory conditions, such as asthma and cystic fibrosis, the use of certain blow toys and playful techniques, such as blowing materials and musical instruments, and making soap bubbles, among others, enhance the results of respiratory physiotherapy in a fun way and pleasurable, both for young patients and their parents, who should be invited to participate in the activities. The concomitant use of music makes the results even better, mainly in improving immunological parameters, emotional state, and increasing lung functions³⁴.

The act of playing contributes to the child's recovery and improves their high self-esteem, favoring their treatment, recovery, and rehabilitation. Because of this, there is a need to use distracting instruments/play materials according to the infant's stage of development, which can reduce behaviors such as anguish, crying, and fear. Such instruments when handled in the presence of parents encourage children even more and facilitate the implementation of techniques necessary for the child's recovery⁴⁴.

Playful activity is a way of promoting the child's reception in the hospital to reduce the impacts caused by illness and hospital admission, in which playfulness can help children master their fears and control their ideas. In this way, using methods that make people safer in this new environment can help professionals use the necessary techniques to better serve them⁴⁵.

The toy can also be used in a specific way, through the clown, with the function of brightening the environment and alleviating the unpleasant sensations of hospitalization, humanizing the hospital context. The positive experience of

the "Doctors of Joy" group in taking the clown to hospitalized children is recounted. Following this same path, researchers⁴⁶ report the daily transformations that the introduction of clowns through the "Laughter Company" brought to the hospital context, making it more relaxed.

Conclusion

This work sought to demonstrate the importance of play for hospitalized children. As stated above, we see entertainment, and playing, as a fundamental process in the treatment of children in the hospital environment, in addition to being an educational resource in the formation and development of the child, it is also a means of aid and contribution to the well-being and on the quality of life of hospitalized children. It is noted that play in the hospital environment leaves the child less stressed, distressed, and more understanding, and is also a form of rapprochement between family, patient and professional, a link of trust, in which health professionals can understand the patient.

It is up to health professionals to delve deeper into this topic and understand that science is not limited to technical procedures, but rather to contributing to the patient's recovery. We must make healthcare less painful and unpleasant for hospitalized children, encouraging studies like this, to provide relief to hospitalized children, as well as healthcare professionals understanding the importance of play within hospital units and the use of this therapy to qualify the assistance provided to minors.

Play is proven to be effective for hospitalized children, but unfortunately, in the current scenario, the multidisciplinary team at hospital units does not have time to dedicate themselves to implementing playful activities and many units do not have a professional focused solely on these activities.

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