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RESEARCH

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## EXPERIMENTING TO PLAY WITH HOSPITALIZED CHILD: PERCEPTION OF NURSING STUDENT

Experimentando o brincar junto a criança hospitalizada: percepção do acadêmico de enfermagem

Experimentando juegos con niños hospitalizados: percepción del académico de enfermería

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To describe the perception of nursing students in relation to playing with hospitalized child. **Method:** qualitative study, which took place from April to June 2016, through recreational activities, followed by a semi-structured interview with 13 nursing students, the interview being transcribed and submitted to thematic analysis. **Results:** academics identified playing as a care strategy for hospitalized children, and this activity should become routine in a hospital environment, as they promote well-being and happiness. In addition, they realized that, through play, the child creates a bond with the professional, facilitating assistance. **Conclusion:** this study contributes to a reflection on playing for the hospitalized child, aiming that this content goes beyond the borders of the classroom, favoring the student's awareness of its future use, as a nurse.

**Descriptors:** Play and playthings, Child hospitalized, Students nursing, Teaching.

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## RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Descrever a percepção dos acadêmicos de enfermagem em relação ao brincar junto à criança hospitalizada. **Método:** estudo qualitativo, que ocorreu no período de abril a junho de 2016, por meio de atividades lúdicas, seguida de entrevista semiestruturada com 13 acadêmicos de enfermagem, sendo a entrevista transcrita e submetida à análise temática. **Resultados:** os acadêmicos identificaram o brincar como uma estratégia de cuidado à criança hospitalizada, devendo esta atividade se tornar rotina em ambiente hospitalar, pois promovem bem-estar e felicidade. Além disso, perceberam que, por meio da brincadeira, a criança cria um vínculo com o profissional, facilitando a assistência. **Conclusão:** este estudo contribui para uma reflexão sobre o brincar para a criança hospitalizada, visando que esse conteúdo ultrapasse as fronteiras da sala de aula, favorecendo a sensibilização do aluno para sua utilização futura, quando enfermeiro.

**Descritores:** Jogos e brinquedos, Criança hospitalizada, Estudantes de enfermagem, Ensino.

## RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** Describir la percepción de los estudiantes de enfermeira com relación al juego com niños hospitalizados. **Método:** estudio cualitativo, que ocurrió de abril a junio de 2016, a través de actividades lúdicas, seguido de com entrevista semiestruturada com 13 estudiantes de enfermeira, la entrevista se transcribió y se sometió a análisis temático. **Resultados:** los académicos identificaron el juego como una estrategia de atención para niños hospitalizados, y esta actividad debería convertirse en rutina en un entorno hospitalario, ya que promueven el bienestar y la felicidad. Además, se dieron cuenta de que, a través del juego, el niño crea un vínculo con el profesional, facilitando la asistencia. **Conclusión:** este estudio contribuye a com reflexión sobre el juego para el niño hospitalizado, com el objetivo de que este contenido vaya más allá de las fronteras del aula, favoreciendo la conciencia del alumno sobre su uso futuro, como enfermeira.

**Descritores:** Juego e implementos de juego, Niño hospitalizado, Estudiantes de enfermeira, Enseñanza.

## INTRODUCTION

Child hospitalization is a stressful and traumatizing event for the child, as a series of changes occur in their daily lives, requiring them to establish new adaptations. She finds a new environment, full of restrictions and routines, with unknown people and, moreover, she is submitted to procedures that generate fear and pain.<sup>1</sup>

In caring for the hospitalized child, the nurse encounters a vulnerable subject not only physically, but also emotionally and socially.<sup>2</sup> In this sense, he/she should provide a welcoming environment that enables the child to express his/her feelings and understand the changes generated by hospitalization.<sup>3</sup>

Among the new philosophical tendencies towards child care, attention is drawn to the atraumatic assistance whose assumptions are aimed at eliminating or minimizing the physical and psychological discomforts experienced by children.<sup>4</sup> In this sense, play emerges as a natural means by which the child expresses himself, besides being essential for his mental, emotional and social well-being.<sup>3</sup>

Playing allows children to express their feelings, reduces the trauma caused by hospitalization, promotes

a bond between the professional and the child, which facilitates nursing care and the performance of procedures in the hospital environment.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, it is a child's right<sup>6</sup> and we cannot deprive the child of this, regardless of the care environment in which he or she finds himself or herself.

To guarantee this right, the nurse must use creativity and play as a care tool. According to the Resolution nº 546/2017 of the Federal Council of Nursing, in its article 1 it disposes about the competence of the Nurse and the nursing team that acts in the pediatric area, while member of the multiprofessional team of health, the use of the technique of the Toy/Therapeutic Toy in the assistance to the child.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the recommendation of the use of toys in child care, many professionals who work in pediatric units are unaware of the importance of playing. This is due to the fact that this content is not offered systematically in the nursing curricula, constituting a difficult factor of its use by nurses in the practice of care, because it determines lack of knowledge of them.<sup>8</sup>

The formation of the nurse must be inclined for humanized assistance in diverse environments and populations. However, a study with nursing academics identified that there is consensus about the benefits of the toy in the care of the hospitalized child, however it is underused in the formation of the nurse, since the knowledge is restricted to the theoretical part and there are few opportunities to use such resources.<sup>9</sup> Thus the inexperience of the graduate in nursing leads him to provide the child only a technical care.<sup>10</sup>

From the above, it was seen that the play brings benefits both for the child and nursing professionals, but for this resource to be used, one must reflect on the situation of hospitalization for the child, the training of the professional nurse, aiming that this future nursing professional has sensitivity to use this resource so important during the care of the hospitalized child.

Thus, this study aimed to describe the perception of nursing academics in relation to playing with the hospitalized child.

## METHODS

Qualitative research<sup>11</sup> developed from April to June 2016 in a pediatric admission unit of a public hospital in the state of Espírito Santo, Brazil. Thirteen students from a Federal Public University participated in the study, who were in the sixth period of the nursing undergraduate course and enrolled in the discipline of Attention to the Health of Women, Children and Adolescents, in the first semester of 2016.

To collect the data, the researcher proposed with the group of students to perform two collective playful activities with the children, on different days, with the children in the

toy library or in another space of the hospital unit itself, as well as, used the play directly during the care of the child at the bedside. It is important to point out that, in order to carry out the practical activities of the discipline, the students were divided into three groups, having two groups with four academics and one with five. Thus, all students were able to participate and get involved in the games.

During the playful activities, the children were able to choose freely between painting, ball, puppet making with paper bag, toys, among others, being able or not to use the material made available by the sector itself or those supplied by the researcher. After the closing of the practical activity of each group, the researcher carried through interview semi-structured with each one of the students, in reserved environment of the infirmary or the nursing department. The testimonies were recorded and transcribed in full and analyzed through thematic analysis: in pre-analysis, exploration of the material and treatment of the results obtained and interpretation.<sup>11</sup> The average duration of the ludic activity and interview was approximately 50 minutes.

All the ethical aspects were respected in accordance with Resolution n° 466/2012 of the National Health Council of Brazil,<sup>12</sup> and the study was approved by the Ethics and Research Committee under the opinion n° 1,254,445. To guarantee the anonymity of the participants, the alphanumeric system was used to identify them, where A was used for “academic” followed by numbering according to the chronological order.

## RESULTS

After analyzing the data, four thematic units emerged: the benefits of playing for the hospitalized child, the factors that facilitate and hinder playing, the importance of playing as part of the care of the hospitalized child, and playing as an important experience for professional training.

### The benefits of playing for the hospitalized child

After the playful activities, the nursing academics recognized that playing in the hospital environment provides the child with moments of distraction, happiness, relief from stress and pain. In addition, they realize that when playing she forgets the condition of the disease.

*So, playing a little distracting, she forgets that she has an illness, that she is having a bad time, that she kind of takes these thoughts away from her. I think it's important. (A10)*

*I realized that they were happier, they were more willing. I realized that she didn't get too happy, that tiring way. After playing I realized that she had an increase, an improvement of 80%. It was very rewarding. I realized their improvement. (A9)*

*They forget the disease, they forget the pain, they forget everything. They just play around. (A4)*

For the academics, playing provides well-being, helps in the conduction of treatment, in facing hospitalization and favors the formation of a bond with the professional.

*It is an essential part of the treatment, bringing lightness to the treatment, bringing well-being to the child, getting out of that monotony of staying in bed, in the bedroom. (A2)*

*I think it is good to provide these moments for the child in order to facilitate all the therapy that will be developed here in the hospital environment. (A1)*

*When I played with the child, I created a bond, that when I arrived in pediatrics the children would look at my face and be happy. So I created a bond and from that bond I was able to work better with the children, to do the procedures better. (A9)*

*Arriving this way [joking], calm and conquering you can do everything very well, without any difficulty. (A13)*

The game was also pointed out as a strategy to know the history of the child and his family.

*Besides playing with the child, we can get to know him more closely, ask him about some personal matters that at the time of assistance they may be intimidated. When it's time to play, they are more open. (A11)*

### The factors that make playing easier and more difficult

The nursing academics highlighted some factors that facilitate the accomplishment of the ludic activities in the unit of internment, such as appropriate space, the desire of the child in participating, the understanding of the professionals and the availability of materials for painting, drawing and toys.

*We have the toy library, which is an important part of pediatrics. (A7)*

*The [toy library] space is already reserved to do this play activity. Children are well disposed to develop these activities and the professional team is also a facilitator who understands this moment as an experience for the child. (A1)*

*This fact that they can take the toy to stay longer with him, be it to paint anything, this is very rewarding for them, they manage to extend a little more this moment of playing. (A4)*

However, they recognize that there are conditions that make it difficult to perform, such as the child's health conditions, time and compatibility of the game with the administration of medication or other therapy.

*The presence of any injury, of any child who is injured. (A1)*

*I think I should have a little more time, or come sooner. And I could have two hours always, in the afternoon too. The afternoon would be good for them. (A12)*

*Sometimes the schedule hits, the time of play with medication or something else and prevents the child from going up [...] sometimes the treatment is at playtime and then prevents the child. (A2)*

### **Playing as part of the hospital routine and the care of the hospitalized child**

In this unit, nursing academics realized that playing should be part of hospital care, not just as academic projects.

*Try to make it become a hospital routine, that the joke becomes a routine inside the hospital. (A1)*

*I think that playing for the hospitalized child is an important part that should have, not as, for example, in your case, a graduation project, but should have as a routine of the hospital. (A10)*

The importance of adopting play in hospital care was signaled as a possibility to make assistance more humanized, recognizing the needs of the child.

*Many times we think that we solve everything by making a dressing, applying a medicine, an analgesic and so on, but no, the child does not only need this, needs attention, needs affection and needs to play. (A9)*

### **Playing as an important experience for professional training**

Nursing academics recognize play as an important activity during their academic training, as they were able to better understand the child and its needs.

*This attempt to create these activities with the children, I think is very good, and also helps in the process of formation in order to integrate the subject, sees the holistic. Understand that the child is not simply the disease, but he or she has just these factors, to be able to play and everything else. (A1)*

*I think this [joke] will help me to better understand this age group of each patient, the needs that this patient requires. (A9)*

The academic also recognizes the need for theoretical content about the play in the discipline of pediatric nursing, guiding its action to its performance in practical field with the hospitalized child.

*Play is not part of the academic curriculum, it's like an extra. It's not like a subject, but I think it would help you more to know how to approach the patient. (A10)*

## **DISCUSSION**

The results of this study revealed that the development of collective playful activities with hospitalized children provided the nursing academics with the possibility of acquiring knowledge, and thus they realized the benefits of playing in this context, because it provides well-being, favors bonds, brings lightness and helps in facing hospitalization.

Being the play an activity of the child, the nurse must make possible to him the continuity of this activity inside the hospital environment. In this sense, it is necessary to make use of creativity and dive into the universe of children, helping the child to face the disease and hospitalization, as shown in a study<sup>13</sup> that used socks and buttons for children to build a doll. The goal was that children could understand hospitalization and face difficult moments expressing their feelings.

Hospitalization is a situation that causes fear in the child, in addition to feelings resulting from a change in routine, family estrangement and constant manipulation of the child's body.<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that the treatment of the disease itself already becomes a traumatic condition for the child, and depending on age, it still does not have control mechanisms for dealing with this situation.<sup>14-15</sup> In this context, the child needs to receive care beyond the technical procedures, which encompasses their physical, emotional and social needs, in addition to their family member.<sup>15-16</sup>

A study<sup>14</sup> conducted in an outpatient clinic in Rio de Janeiro found that the care that includes playful activities developed with children is of great importance for the relief of boredom from hospitalization. Moreover, playing not only provides distraction to the child, but also enables learning through play and allows the recreation of experiences lived through the imagination, thus facilitating the confrontation of hospitalization.<sup>17</sup>

The joke also allows the creation of the link<sup>5</sup>, which corroborates the speech of the nursing academics of this study. Playing, the nurse starts to communicate with the child using an adequate language, which allows the orientation and procedures to be done, so the child feels respected by the adult who is assisting her, which favors the relationship between both. Besides the benefits that playing provides to the child, its use can be facilitated by having an adequate space like the toy, or made difficult due to the child's condition.

It is also important to point out that, for the children,

the nursing professionals must take care of them with affection, calling them by name and some would like to be called friends, as revealed in a study. In addition, they emphasize that they need to play and be funny<sup>18</sup>, this reveals that playing is necessary to be part of nursing care and reinforces the importance of the presence of one available to play with them and that values such activity.<sup>19</sup>

A study developed with nurses pointed out that the lack of time and knowledge are difficult factors for the development of therapeutic toy in a children's hospital in northeast Brazil. In addition to these factors, lack of interest, training and excessive attribution were also cited.<sup>20</sup>

The environment for play can happen in any space of the hospital, either in the bed of the bedridden child or in the toy library. However, it is notorious that some institutions do not have a reserved space or necessary materials that allow children to perform these activities, as was mentioned by some academics in this study. Thus, lack of space and adequate materials are factors that make it difficult to use toys in the care of hospitalized children.<sup>20</sup> It is necessary to guarantee spaces for the child to be fully assisted. The toy library is an essential place in the pediatric ward for playing.

According to the law nº 11.104 of 2005, all institutions that offer pediatric care must have toys in their premises.<sup>21</sup> This space provides the child not only opportunities to play, because it contains toys for each age group, but it is also a place that provides social interaction with other children who experience the same conditions.

Although many institutions do not have toys, playing cannot be restricted to this space. It is necessary to allow this playful activity to be performed in place and when the child wishes, requests and needs it. The act of playing should be timely for the child and not for the professional.<sup>3</sup> Even with some impossibilities one of the academics reports about the possibility of the child taking some toys to the room, stating that this was as an extension of the toy library for him. The toy needs to be established as essential in the care of the child by the nurses, in order to also contribute to the proximity of the family with the professional. When the professional has a good relationship with the family, there is an improvement in the care and treatment of the hospitalized child.<sup>15</sup>

In this same context, the results of another study with nursing academics, made it possible to verify that these, when presented to the therapeutic toy, start to value it as an important intervention in the assistance to the child. However, they reveal that the teacher's stimulus during this practice is fundamental for his future performance as a nurse, providing an adequate communication with the child, conferring quality of his care and awakening in a more humanized care.<sup>22</sup>

Nursing academics have reinforced the importance of the play experience for their training as a nurse, demonstrating that in the future, when they are nurses, they

will strive to have the hospitalized child respected in their needs when playing in the hospital environment. In this sense, the nurse has an essential role in the maintenance of play within the hospital, since, when being sensitized during graduation about the functions and benefits of this activity use in their care practice.<sup>23</sup>

Some nursing schools emphasize the importance of play for child development in their undergraduate and specialization courses, through the teaching of the therapeutic toy as an instrument of nursing intervention since 1980. In this context, the theoretical and practical principles of therapeutic toy are highlighted, and academics are encouraged to use them, both in hospital and out-of-hospital settings, and in various situations.<sup>24</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

The data from this study made it possible for the nursing academic to understand and reflect on the experience of playing for hospitalized children. It is noted that, for him, hospitalization for children can become a little less traumatic when they are provided with an environment that meets their needs, being play their main activity.

Nursing academics understood that from the play, the child is able to create strategies for bundling the process of hospitalization. In addition, the play is an instrument that promotes confidence and strengthens the bond between the child, his family and the professional, facilitating the achievement of quality care. Thus, when they recognize the importance of playing in the assistance practice, they mobilize to fully meet the needs of the child, and not just perform technical procedures.

Therefore, from this study, reaffirms the need to introduce theoretical and practical content about the subject in the graduation curricula in nursing, so that future nurses become aware of this practice and its importance to the care of the hospitalized child, thus ensuring a more humanized assistance that really meets all the needs of the child by including play in the center of their care.

Moreover, this study also shows that the playful activities employed during the nursing care of the child have the same importance for the maintenance and recovery of their health as the other activities. It is pointed out as a limitation of the study the little time of permanence of the academics in the infirmary, what limited their experience of the same ones to two meetings.

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