

What do sick kids really want in hospital?

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Too often we assume we know how children are really feeling. Credit: Edith Cowan University

Feeling safe and being able to get to sleep at night are the things that matter most to sick kids in hospital, according to world-first research from Edith Cowan University.

Researchers at ECU's School of Nursing developed the 'Needs of Children Questionnaire' (NCQ), the first of its kind to measure [children](#)'s self-reported psychosocial, physical and emotional needs in paediatric wards.

They assessed 193 [school-aged children](#) in paediatric settings in Australia and New Zealand.

More than 1.7 million Australian children were admitted to [hospital](#) in 2016-17, according to the most recently available figures, some for a short visit and some for lengthy and regular stays.

Lead researcher Dr. Mandie Foster said the study fills a gap in our understanding of how children are feeling in hospital settings.

"Historically the literature on children's needs and experiences within [healthcare settings](#) have been largely limited to surveys completed by adults answering for children," Dr. Foster said.

"To our knowledge, no instrument has been available to assess the perception of the needs of school-aged children during a hospital stay.

"Development of the NCQ is part of an international movement to place children as central to care delivery, which honours the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child."

The most important needs

The children surveyed identified their most important needs as:

1. "To know I am safe and will be looked after."
2. "To get enough sleep at night."
3. "That staff listen to me."
4. "To have places my parents can go to for food and drinks."
5. "To have my mum, dad or family help care for me."

Dr. Foster said it was important to let children in hospital communicate for themselves.

"As adults, we often make assumptions about children's needs and wants, but hospitals can be a scary and unfamiliar environment for many children and we shouldn't assume we know how they are feeling.

"Being listened to and understood can give children an added sense of confidence about the situation they find themselves in.

"And from a medical point of view, child self-reports are essential to inform healthcare delivery, policy, research and theory development."

Dr. Foster said children's needs are often interconnected to those of their parents, so if parents feel informed, valued and cared for, then their children are more likely to feel relaxed.

"From a child's perspective, feeling safe means having mum and dad here to help care for me, smiling nurses, special time spent with me just talking, not treats, just time to get better," she said.

Dr. Mandie Foster is a nursing lecturer, research scholar and experienced paediatric nurse. 'Development and validation of the Needs of Children Questionnaire (NCQ): An instrument to measure children's self-reported needs in hospital' is published in the *Journal of Advanced Nursing*.

Dr. Foster will present her findings at the AUT Child & Youth Health Research Centre's Research Presentation Series at AUT University, New Zealand, on Thursday 4 July.

More information: Mandie Foster et al. Development and validation of the Needs of Children Questionnaire (NCQ): An instrument to measure children's self-reported needs in hospital, *Journal of Advanced Nursing* (2019). [DOI: 10.1111/jan.14099](https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.14099)

Provided by Edith Cowan University

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