Defining the Problem of Immunizing Children Who Strongly Resist Needle Injection

Background

Literature from the fields of psychology, nursing, pharmacology, medicine, and dentistry reveals fear of needles as one of children’s greatest fears, with claims that up to 93% of some groups of children and as many as 10% of adults experience serious immunization-associated stress. Clearly, nurses can expect to encounter both children who are frightened and resistant to needles as well as parents or caregivers who are also fearful.

Despite this evidence, little is known about what the experience of immunizing frightened and needle-resistant children can be like for nurses. The purpose of the study was to explore nurses’ experiences of immunizing children who are frightened of needles, and to consider approaches that are helpful in decreasing nurse stress.

35 public health nurses from five different health units within Fraser Health attended focus groups and discussed the question: “Sometimes children who present for immunization strongly resist needle injection. Based on your experience, what is it about this situation that is a problem for you?”

Results

Four main themes emerged:
1) Nurses experience stress when immunizing children who fear and resist needle injection
2) The strength of child resistance and some adult behavior creates an ethical dilemma for nurses
3) Some adult responses make immunizing difficult and unsafe
4) Resources to help nurses cope with these situations are inconsistent

Spotlight on...

Supportive Health Policy based on:
- Experiences of caregivers
- Planning preventive strategies to optimize good patient outcomes
- Making improvements in care delivery

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Impact for FH


- Further research in this area could lead to more consistent support for nurses responsible for immunizing children and to more consistent best practice and positive outcomes for all (i.e. a least restraint policy).

- Most recently, representatives from the Prince Albert Parkland health region in Saskatchewan requested permission to use the article (Immunizing Children Who Fear and Resist Needles: Is it a Problem for Nurses?) as a basis for policy development.

How Do I Learn More?

- A parent information brochure has been developed for use throughout Fraser Health and can be viewed at: [http://immunizingchildren.wordpress.com](http://immunizingchildren.wordpress.com) or ordered from the print shop (#256111)

- Content specific to this issue has been added to the BCCDC immunization manual (Sect. IV, p.20-21) available online at: [http://www.bccdc.ca/NR/rdonlyres/D8264FFC-445B-439E-A3E7-763374383206/0/SectionIV_AdministrationofBiologicalProducts_Jan05.pdf](http://www.bccdc.ca/NR/rdonlyres/D8264FFC-445B-439E-A3E7-763374383206/0/SectionIV_AdministrationofBiologicalProducts_Jan05.pdf)