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Codesigning therapeutic and sterilisable soft toys for Paediatric Inpatients

Abstract

Surgery for very young patients is a challenging time as they are not fully aware of why the surgery is needed, what it entails, and they may not have the presence and support of their family all the time because the rules of clinical environments do not allow that.

Throughout NHS England, the average time spent by a child in the Paediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU) is 7 days. In 2015 alone, 60,082 children were admitted to NHS England PICU wards and this is not inclusive of those staying overnight in other wards.

Often when children are admitted to hospital, they bring toys that function as objects of support and emotional reassurance. However, in an increasing number of NHS Trusts around England, soft toys are being banned from hospital wards due to infection control reasons.

This project designed and developed a sterilisable therapeutic soft toy for paediatric hospital wards through a co-design approach which involved play therapists, nurses, patients, teachers and families. The paediatric patients and their families are also supported by a companion book, which includes with injury stickers, healing diary, and rewarding token for each therapy the child receives.

The application of codesign methods allowed for the identification of the key requirements, the aspirations of the patients, their family and clinical staff. Creative workshop with the paediatric patients also enabled to explore the emotional connections with the toy that children sought.

The final design embodies therapeutic, educational and companionship attributes identified in the design process. Finally, as the toy has been designed to be sterilised following current NHS processes, it has been made with natural materials and can be enjoyed by several paediatric patients, with less impact for the environment.