

A Charter for Children in Hospital, 1983

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It may be possible for certain basic rights of sick children to be agreed by the professions caring for them, by health authorities, community health councils and patients' representatives. These principles could then be used in every hospital department where children are treated, as a guide to standards of care. A charter for children in hospital has not been discussed in Britain. We offer some principles based on agreed statements to start discussions in this country, Our Director hopes to receive your views on the content and use of a children's charter.

1. The child shall not be admitted to hospital if this can possibly be avoided. Medical and nursing treatment at home and in outpatient and day care centres shall be promoted.
2. The child needs love and understanding and shall have right of access to his* parents at all times, remaining under their care and responsibility. In order to be able to care fully for their child, parents shall be informed about ward routines and offered comfortable accommodation.
3. The child and/or his parents shall have the right to informed participation in all decisions involving his healthcare. The child shall be protected from unnecessary medical treatment and physical or emotional distress. He shall be treated with tact and understanding and with respect for privacy. The child, or on his behalf the parents, shall have the right to refuse to serve as a research subject and to refuse any care or examination when the main purpose is for education or information rather than therapy. A parent shall normally be present during procedures unless the child is unconscious.
4. The child shall enjoy the care of professionals trained to respond to the physical and emotional needs of each age group, under the guidance of a paediatrician and sick children's nurses.
5. The child shall be nursed in company with other children of the same age group in conditions of freedom and dignity. Wards should be furnished and equipped to meet children's requirements. The child shall use his own clothes and personal possessions. Supervision and care to prevent accidents are important.
6. The child shall have full opportunity for play and recreation. The child who is physically, mentally or socially handicapped shall be given special care required by his condition.
7. Well children shall be allowed to visit their sick relatives in hospital frequently and regularly if the patient so wishes.

To be acceptable and useful, a charter should be a little ahead of its time but not too radical, be brief but not too vague. Should a charter for children deal

with the distinct needs of children or could it include general interests which they share with adults? The following principles which have been agreed for adult patients (and some have been enacted into law, for example, in Massachusetts) may seem to too general or radical for a UK charter for children.

The patient has a right:

- 1. to complete and accurate information concerning medical care and procedures;*
- 2. to have a complete copy of all his information contained in his medical records;*
- 3. to prompt attention;*
- 4. to be introduced to all staff;*
- 5. to have access to an interpreter (for non-English speakers).*

Sources for the children's charter:

UN *Declaration of the Rights of the Child* 1924.

Platt Report. *The Welfare of Children in Hospital*. 1959, HMSO.

American Hospital Association. *A Patient's Bill of Rights*, 1972.

Boston Children's Hospital. *Patients' Bill of Rights*.

ACH Australia. *Statement of Principles* 1982.

Australian College of Paediatrics. *Discretionary surgery in children*, 1982.

* This first version preceded the United Nations 1989 *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, and used the sexist language of the time.