

What do parents think about their children being involved in medical education?

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Editor – Many of our students express concern during their paediatric attachment about interviewing and examining children. In particular, they feel they may not know how to talk to or handle the child and that they may intrude on the family at a sensitive time. We wondered how parents viewed medical student visits – if, as for adult patients, the experience was beneficial,^{1–3} or if the parents were similarly apprehensive about seeing students.

We designed an anonymised questionnaire collecting information about the child and his or her illness. Parental attitudes to students and medical education were examined with a mixture of numeric scores and free text. This was distributed to 127 parents of acute and elective paediatric inpatients in a teaching hospital. A total of 105 (83%) completed questionnaires were returned.

We were surprised to find that 93.1 (SE: 4.9)% of parents were

happy to talk to students, and 86 (SE: 6.7) % were happy to let their child be examined. These attitudes were unrelated to the child's age and sex, whether his or her admission had been as an emergency or elective, or illness severity. Those who would refuse access to their child were concerned about distress to themselves or their child or disruption to feeding and sleep. Those who would consent more often felt that students 'should see as many children as possible' (all $P < 0.05$, χ^2 test).

Free text responses were generally very positive about student involvement ('Medical students are just as valuable as doctors/nurses') and many reflected parents' commitment to their part in the training of new doctors ('I completely disagree that you learn from textbooks only'). Concerns mostly related to the supervision of students ('...parents need to be reassured').

We were very pleased to find that parents were enthusiastic about being involved and allowing their children to be seen by students as part of medical education. We have been able to reassure our students accordingly and ensure that they are given appropriate supervision and training in paediatric clinical skills.

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doi: 10.1111/j.1365-2923.2007.02831.x