



"When someone stabs you": children's perspectives of venepuncture

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Review

yet sense stigma if services are poorly explained or offered apologetically. Paediatricians need to be equipped to work to the edge of the specialist mental health services they feed, and vice versa. Greater overlap during specialist training and continuing education would help, with priority to joint case discussions. Liaison mental health services need to be available to families and paediatricians as a routine, not an exception.¹⁰

We need to position the wing-mirrors carefully and remember to use them, not merely tighten up the Highway Code. We should resist the assumption that one model of medical care fits all, and be as stringent in evaluating the system itself as the practice it serves.

Competing interests: None.

Images in paediatrics

“When someone stabs you”: children’s perspectives of venepuncture

The suffering experienced by children during phlebotomy or cannulation has been well documented from observations of nurses and parents.^{1,2} Despite several proven interventions that reduce the impact of these procedures, such as topical anaesthesia, play therapy and distraction,^{3–6} few specialist trainees are properly trained in venepuncture or know about the use of these interventions, markedly contrasting with paediatric phlebotomists (private correspondence (2008) describing standard training in the phlebotomy department at John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford).

We sought to examine this further by asking children about their experiences using a questionnaire incorporating free text and with space to draw a picture describing their experiences. The children were inpatients in a general ward in a tertiary hospital and participated with parental consent. The study was approved by the LREC.

A total of 37 children aged 3–18 years completed the questionnaire. They found venepuncture extremely distressing, with 24/37 finding it worse than anything they could imagine. When asked to describe the experience, comments included “It’s like when someone stabs you”, “It hurts and it’s horrible” and “It hurt a lot and it felt like someone smashing a hammer on my thigh”. Their drawings emphasise the size of the needle and syringe, the emotional impact and the physical invasiveness of the procedure (fig 1).

Venepuncture is consistently amongst the most distressing aspects of a hospital admission for children and a major contributor to hospital related morbidity. Much could be done to alleviate this, but training is patchy and interventions shown to reduce distress are not uniformly used.

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Figure 1 Children’s drawings of venepuncture.

Ethics approval: The project was approved by the Wandsworth LREC.

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