



Building Children's Nursing for Africa Conference: 22–24 April 2015

A participative conference for neonatal, paediatric and paediatric critical care nurses to celebrate and build best practice of nurses in caring for children and their families

Report from Day 2: Finding More Voices in the Context of Child Health Care

It is well recognised that there are a number of 'voices' at play in healthcare – ranging from those of patients, caregivers, healthcare workers, and even outside influences. On day one of the second Building Children's Nursing (BCN) conference in Cape Town, the primary focus had been on nurses finding their own voices as key contributors to child healthcare. For the second day of the conference, this focus shifted to include the voices and perspectives of service users - namely parents/caregivers, children and adolescents.

Day two kicked off with a focus on 'finding and working with the voices of parents'. Not only were presentations included from healthcare workers about the importance of collaboration between parents and caregivers, but Cape Town based parents, JP and Sharon Kloppers, shared their personal experiences of the nursing care received during a period of their son's hospitalisation while he was in a critical condition. Perspectives such as these are pertinent to the conference's aims of highlighting the importance of family-centred healthcare – as Sarah Neill, Associate Professor in Children's Nursing at the University of Northampton, says: "health professionals are good at coming up with research ideas from the own experiences, but not necessarily from the perspective of a parent."

Presentations from Sarah Neill, Jane Booth (Advanced Paediatric Clinical Nurse at Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital) and Brazilian Associate Professor, Debora Falleiros De Mello, from the University of São Paulo, focused on promoting collaboration between healthcare workers and the parents of sick children. "Trust the parent or mother," says Jane Booth, "to care for *her* child in *her* community – because this leads to her feeling empowered and further empowering her community."

The emphasis on service users did not end there: the focus then shifted to finding and including the voices of adolescents. Four teenagers, Hamsa, Roxy, Keesha and Ayesha – all of whom are adolescent patients receiving ongoing medical care – sat on a panel to discuss their own perspectives on their treatment and to share their views on different caregivers. The teenagers complimented nurses on their abilities to be compassionate and exceed in their level of care. Indeed, the adolescents praised nurses' abilities over those of other caregivers: "Nurses are often put on the side-lines," says seventeen year old Ayesha, "they should have the same value as doctors." However, despite this praise, there was still much to learn from these young representatives, who have the most important voice of all when it comes to their own care.

Stephanie Sieberhagen, Senior Researcher at the Child Nurse Practice Development Initiative, shared on the importance of family involvement in child healthcare and its increasing recognition in the field. By way of illustration, conference delegates were asked to role-play as various members of a healthcare team (nurses, children, parents, and hospital managers) and imagine a future where families are intentionally involved in caring for children in healthcare settings.

Through this participative design session, ideas, experiences, and stories were shared that could potentially aid in the improvement of the healthcare environment. Indeed, throughout this conference, stories about working through and overcoming hardships and challenges in healthcare increasingly came to the forefront. "These stories are full of strength, courage, and innovative ideas from which we can all benefit,"

says Stephanie. “But there are more stories out there, many more that we are yet to hear and learn from. The need to capture these stories in a scientific way that makes sense to management and government, that will be able to put numbers on a piece of paper in a way that will bring about real change in thinking about policy, is in front of us right now and cannot be ignored.”

Author: Christopher Booth