
'It's just for a couple of days'

A real-life story. In 1979, a mother wrote a letter to Kind en Ziekenhuis about the shocking way in which she was treated by an ophthalmologist. Her request for information concerning the operation that her young daughter needed to undergo was completely ignored. The way in which this mother was treated by this ophthalmologist was what motivated her to become a member of the association.

Our daughter, aged two, has a squint and it was for this reason that I took her to the hospital to see the ophthalmologist. After two visits lasting just a few minutes each, during which I was given conflicting advice (on one occasion he wanted to seal up one eye, on the other he didn't, then he decided there was a squint in both eyes, then it was only right or left again), the doctor decided to operate. When I requested further information about what exactly was going to happen, whether I could be present when my daughter came round from the anaesthetic etc., the exact response I was given was: 'We are only going to do what is in your daughter's best interest.' !!! 'When she comes round from the anaesthetic there will be nurses present. They are specially trained for this and are far more capable of caring for children in this situation than mothers.' The children do like it when their parents come and visit them, but they are just as happy when they go again.' !!! Etcetera. The doctor also told me that I would only make my daughter more nervous by telling her what was going to happen to her. 'It's really not that serious anyway, it's just for a couple of days.'

Sad

These answers and the ophthalmologist's reluctance to tell me what exactly was going to happen to my daughter's eyes made it abundantly clear to me how helpful and indeed indispensable the work that an association like yours does is. In any case, the hospital concerned presents a considerable challenge for Kind en

Ziekenhuis, because the way in which you are denied any information there, and their denial of the existence of any other interests of children aside from medical interests is quite frankly very sad and behind the times. I cannot comment on whether this is the case throughout the entire hospital, but as far as the ophthalmologist is concerned, the attitude is: what the doctor does is for the benefit of the child, so let's hear no more about it.

Explanation

In the end, for a number of reasons we did not allow our daughter to be operated on in this hospital. Instead we went to see an ophthalmologist in a nearby town. She was quickly admitted there for surgery to correct her left eye. I have to say that at this hospital they did at least answer your questions and you did get an explanation from the doctor about how and why the surgery would take place. I also took my daughter to have a look at the ward in which she would be staying in the hope that it would all seem a little less foreign to her when she was admitted. There is however room for improvement at this hospital, particularly in terms of the visiting hours on the children's ward (two times one hour per day).

This letter has previously been published in Kind en Ziekenhuis, September 1979, page 36, under the title 'Nog een praktijkverhaal van een onzer leden' [Another real-life story from one of our members]. The letter was at that time published anonymously at the request of the mother.