

# nursing specialty

## Paediatric Nursing

Paediatric Nursing is a specialised field of practice for registered nurses in the care of children from birth through to adolescence. The differences between nursing children, who are in the early stages of their growth and development, and adults are many but most obviously they relate to the physical size of the body and its physiology in the younger years and the ways in which the minds of children of various ages work. Children are also minors, often unable to make decisions for themselves and so parents are generally very much involved in their care when they become ill.

Not surprisingly, it is these and many other factors that greatly influence the approach taken as to the delivery of care to children.

A paediatric or children's nurse's role is to provide and promote optimal health care for children up to the age of eighteen years of age. Within a hospital setting, paediatric nurses are an integral part of the multidisciplinary team which provides holistic care for children with acute and chronic illness. The major objective is to assess children's nursing needs, then plan and deliver care so that nursing is provided in partnership with children and their families and follows negotiation with them.

### What makes Paediatric Nursing special?

While understanding that children have many different needs to be considered when they are being cared for, working with and nursing children is challenging, lots of fun, interesting (every day), always changing, exciting, rewarding, sometimes sad, fulfilling and overwhelmingly satisfying.

Children's nurses work closely with families and an important aspect of the role is sharing the nursing with the child's parents who would normally look after them at home and helping them gain the confidence and ability to do so. Another is for the nurse to know when to stand back and when to take over.

Children are individuals and therefore, in addition to the age factor, they differ tremendously in size, shape, temperament, attitude, upbringing and behaviour. They vary in their responses to ill health, tests and investigations, treatments and hospitalisation. Increasingly, cultural diversity can also impact on ways in which care is delivered and health promoted.

At the same time, the range of illnesses that children have can vary widely, but for the paediatric nurse, this means that no two situations are the same and there is always something new to learn. Consider nursing a baby in an intensive care situation versus an adolescent with a mental health problem or a child with diabetes versus one who has just undergone open heart surgery – the differences are quite extreme.

One of the challenges facing the paediatric nurse is gaining the trust and confidence of each child in their care as well as the child's carer so that they can help families deal with all the emotions attached to having a sick child such as fear, pain, anxiety and sometimes guilt.

The role of the paediatric nurse, therefore, also includes the provision of support and education for both families and the child, so the family can manage the care for themselves, the child can go or return to school, grow to their fullest potential, be as healthy as possible and, eventually become an independent adult.

### Some activities undertaken by the Paediatric Nurse

Within the health care system, being part of a multidisciplinary team means working alongside specialist doctors, social workers and physiotherapists and other professionals. It also means working in many different settings such as in acute areas of a hospital, in rehabilitation and outpatient units, in community centres and in schools as school nurses.

Some of the general responsibilities that paediatric nurses have include:

- Co-ordinating the care of the multidisciplinary team
- Advocating for the child who is in their care
- Communicating skilfully between the patient, their family and the health care providers
- Observing and reporting on the condition of patients
- Preparing patients for tests, treatments and operations and sometimes assisting directly with these procedures
- Recording vital signs and keeping accurate records of these observations

- Setting up, maintaining and checking intravenous infusions and various other types of equipment
- Administering medications
- Giving support, advice, reassurance and education to patients and close relatives, and
- Promoting normal growth and development through activities such as play.

## Specialising in Paediatric Nursing

To become a paediatric nurse, you first need to become a registered nurse by completing a Bachelor of Nursing which is available at most Australian universities.

Many of the undergraduate degrees these days offer elective subjects and clinical practice opportunities in paediatrics, that enable the nursing student to focus on this clinical area and gain some in depth knowledge and experience in the specialty before they graduate.

In addition to graduate level courses that enable registered nurses without paediatric experience to study and work in this specialty with confidence, there are also many specialty areas within paediatric nursing from which to choose including intensive care, emergency, oncology, mental health and child and family health.

Ongoing education for paediatric nurses is available in the workplace and professional development activity can involve attendance at conferences, workshops and seminars.

Research takes many forms and when related to improving the delivery of nursing care, is seen as an essential component of everyone's practice.

Scholarships are available to all nurses to undertake further study, attend a conference or undertake a research project. They are available through many sources including NSW Health, universities and professional bodies.

## Working as a Paediatric Nurse in SESIH

Paediatric nursing is practised in many different settings in SESIH and paediatric nurses are employed in semi-rural and regional settings as well as metropolitan, tertiary and specialist referral centres.

Paediatric services are available in the following hospitals:

- Shoalhaven District Memorial Hospital
- St George Hospital
- Sutherland Hospital
- Sydney Children's Hospital and Community Child Health Services
- Wollongong Hospital

Other than Sydney Children's Hospital which provides tertiary specialist care along with care to the local community, all other centres have acute inpatient paediatric wards and emergency care, school nursing and child and family health services delivering community care to children from birth to five years of age.

**Consider the many rewards of working as a paediatric nurse and the benefits of doing so in SESIH.**