

# staying in: a day in the Hall Ward inpatient unit...

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The idea of staying in hospital, particularly in a psychiatric unit can be pretty daunting (even as an adult). So here's to sharing some information that should make it all seem a little less scary!

Firstly, we are here to help. The vast majority of the patients that stay on our ward are voluntary. That means they have agreed to come in of their own accord. In fact, in special circumstances, some patients come back more than once.

Second, the ward is designed for children and adolescents! We even have our own school classroom which only the Hall Ward patients attend. That means there's a maximum of eight in the class. So patients need not worry about missing out on too much school work or about being overwhelmed by attending a large school. We also have a games room with a Wii, a large screen TV and a Playstation. But just like home, the patients only really get to use these "toys" in free time when all the work is done.

Every day we have a pretty similar routine. We know that simple and consistent routines can be very beneficial for children and adolescents generally. When going through difficult times with mental health issues these are particularly important and can offer a sense of calm and structure.

We have a great team of nurses who have a good knowledge and understanding of both mental health and paediatrics. Nurses get the patients up, help with breakfast in the dining area then get them ready for school (including any medications, observations and bloods required). Just like at home, patients are expected to shower and keep their rooms clean before heading off to school. Some patients have single rooms and some share. It really depends on ages and the mix on the ward.

Our school day is shorter than most and runs between nine and two. Class work comes from each child's home school so that kids can keep up with important work. The Hall Ward classroom also runs some of its own activities like craft and cooking. Just after morning tea the patients also have physio. We run physio for a couple of reasons. First, because our ward is small and is a locked unit (to en-

sure patient safety) it is nice to have some time out and a chance to let off some energy. Second, and more importantly, physio recognises the role of exercise in both our physical and mental health. Daily exercise is important for all of us!

After school we usually run a group. Patients are expected to attend groups as part of their therapeutic treatment. Some groups are psychoeducational. On Hall Ward these groups are typically based on special treatment approaches. Frequently we focus on Distress Tolerance and Mindfulness strategies. Other groups include leisure activities (designed to encourage good socialisation/peer skills), art and craft and therapeutic music groups. Therapeutic music groups are a particular favourite among the patients and are often also run on Saturdays!

After group it's time to relax and see Mum and Dad. Visitors are allowed on the ward between four and eight in the evening. We encourage all parents to visit their children regularly (if possible daily), as we see the family as key to a child's recovery and mental health and wellbeing. Some patients might have visitors on the ward while others may go out for dinner or even go home overnight if they and their families feel up to it.

At some point during the day each of the patients are likely to have some individual

time with one of our Doctors and/or Allied Health Staff. We have one Consultant Psychiatrist, currently Dr Lucy Chapman, and two Junior Doctors (a Registrar and a Resident). We also have a Social Worker, a Clinical Psychologist and an Occupational Therapist. Who the child sees and how regularly will depend on each child's individual needs, their care plan and where they are at in their treatment. Families are also expected to come in for regular meetings so that they can work

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together with the team to support their child for ongoing improvement. Some meetings may also involve the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) who will be involved to support the child and their family once they leave the ward.

Then at eight-thirty it is time to head for bed. This might seem early, but these can feel like long days especially for patients who are unwell and working hard on getting better. A good rest is important to be able to help us prepare and face the next day. As any of us will know, lack of sleep equates to bad moods and poor coping and we are working against that!

And that's about it really. We take a wide range of kids with multiple illnesses and disabilities (however, all patients must be medically stable). We try to get patients out as quickly as possible (and in fact it's illegal for us to keep a child in if they can be treated in a less restrictive manner) so our average stay is usually about two to three weeks. Some might stay longer; some might stay shorter but remember, like I said first, WE ARE HERE TO HELP.

Please note admission to the ward requires a comprehensive mental health assessment within the 24 hours prior to admission. Parents, children, teachers and school counsellors should seek medical consultation with their GP or Community Mental Health Services as their first point of call. If you or your family are expecting an upcoming inpatient visit please phone the ward to organise more information and discuss the option of coming to see the unit. ●

