



Getting it Right for children

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In its 75th year, it is important to assess the role of St Joseph's Home in the health system for children in the Western Cape Province.

Its role is an extremely valuable one in three critical areas -

1. It provides a berth for children with complex medical problems who require nursing care and therapies that cannot be managed in the child's home, nor require an acute hospital bed. Thus children with difficult diabetes, cancer, renal disease, certain cardiac diseases etc. from the tertiary and secondary hospitals (such as Tygerberg Hospital, Red Cross Children's Hospital and Groote Schuur Hospital) can safely be housed at St Joseph's, and obtain their medical care while also receiving schooling and experiencing a routine more akin to home or boarding school than an acute hospital could offer. Children with HIV/AIDS also benefit from this aspect in the Sunflower Ward. Some older children with HIV/AIDS benefit from the services of the general wards and the school. In addition, St Joseph's is more able to prepare the children and their parents for living at home than the acute hospitals are able to do.
2. The paediatric ward in the acute hospitals in the Cape Peninsula, are constantly under pressure of numbers. That children can receive their care at St Joseph's prevents some inpatient services such as Oncology and Nephrology from collapsing, reduces occupancies and allows access to other children with acute illnesses. The burden of HIV-related disease on hospitals especially level 2 hospitals such as New Somerset Hospital and Groote Schuur Hospital is mitigated by access to St Joseph's. Notably the Home continuously runs extra beds to deal with this demand.
3. Some patients at St Joseph's are relatively well yet their home circumstances are such that they would be at serious risk of severe complications of their health problem if they lived at home. Repeated hospital admissions are a likely consequence of attempts to live in disrupted homes. Diabetes mellitus and cystic fibrosis are examples of conditions in this category. Again, the child and the provincial health system benefit from St Joseph's place in the chain of care.

Through the work of the Home's health team including social workers every attempt is made to prepare the children for a return to their homes whenever it becomes appropriate to do so.

There is little doubt that St. Joseph's Home is a major asset to health care services in the Western Cape Province. Its cleanliness, high standards of nursing care and the loving attention received by the children makes it an institution of note and I am proud to be associated with it.



Prof Tony Westwood
(Clinical Coordinator – Child Health services, Department of Health, Western Cape)