



## Can an 'Unusual' Model of Nursing Uniform Facilitate the Contact between Health Professionals and Sick Children?

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### Abstract

**Background:** The nursing uniform model has constantly changed and nowadays it represents a distinctive sign that characterizes the nurse's professional identity and recognition. The nursing uniform can provoke various positive or negative perceptions in patients particularly if we are talking about children, in these cases it can cause fear and fright, representing in the worst case an obstacle to communication.

**Objective:** To evaluate the effects of an adapted nursing uniform model on children, their appreciation and reduction of fear.

**Methods:** We conducted a survey in an pediatric Italian hospital setting, showing several pictures with various models of adapted nursing uniforms (characteristics and pictures drawn by cartoons and popular videogames) to a sample of 50 children asking them to choose their favorite one. We also observed the behavior and their attitude (non-verbal communication and gestures).

**Conclusion:** Our findings seemed determine that a nursing uniform adapted, in accordance with the preferences of children could facilitate the approach to the pediatric patient, dialogue and contact and brought the nurse closer to the child, almost as a playmate. This study represents a further contribute of how effective the use of a nursing uniform shaped on the characteristics pleasing to children can be.

**Keywords:** Nursing uniform; Health professionals; Sick children

### Short Communication

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Received Date: 25 May 2018

Accepted Date: 12 Jun 2018

Published Date: 18 Jun 2018

**Citation:**

Giuseppe M, Piera S. Can an 'Unusual' Model of Nursing Uniform Facilitate the Contact between Health Professionals and Sick Children?. *Nurs Stud Pract Int.* 2018; 1(1): 1001.

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The nursing uniform model has constantly changed, passing from the original servant or militaristic connotation (19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century) to represent nowadays a distinctive sign that characterizes the nurses' professional identity and recognition. The nursing uniform is a non-verbal means of communication, which can at first sight indicate the role of the professional, the qualities and attitudes that can be expected [1]. The nursing uniform can provoke various positive perceptions in patients as sense of trust and reassurance [2] and can increase the perception of professionalism and recognition [3], even in other cases, especially if the patients are children, it can cause fear and fright, representing in the worst case an obstacle to communication [4-6]. And probably for these reasons we can observe an even increasing interest to accommodate the needs of young patients even in adopting a nursing uniform model that could facilitate the contact and improve the collaboration between nurses and little patients. Among the new typical characters of pediatric nursing uniform that we can find in the literature we observe colored uniforms with pastel shades or colorful, with cartoon or fantasy subjects or taken from videogames, while other versions provide the possibility to write or draw on them. We have a certain number of studies that have investigated about the effects of a nursing uniform adapted to the needs of children. A proper nursing uniform can reduce firstly children's fear and discomfort [2,5,7], in other cases it can involve and improve both children and parents' perceptions as better expectations [8,9], better professional image [5,10], capable to create a more relaxed atmosphere [11]. A survey conducted in an Italian hospital setting seemed to confirm that an adapted nursing uniform model was more appreciated by children, who became more available to treatments and contact with health care professionals because the reduction of fear. In the same survey we found not only full agreement between nurses and children about the models of preferred uniform but also full availability by health professionals to wear nursing uniforms in accordance with the models chosen and appreciated by children. Our findings seemed determine that a nursing uniform adapted, in accordance with the preferences of children could facilitate the approach to the pediatric patient, dialogue and contact and brought the nurse closer

to the child, almost as a playmate. A nurse who participated in the study told us how the dialogue with the colored uniform had become much simpler and how it had become more and more frequent that the child was already addressing him at the first contact in a friendly tone, while it was usually even difficult to get a simple 'hello'. This study represent a further contributes of how effective the use of a nursing uniform shaped on the characteristics pleasing to children can be, it is affordable in terms of not entailing excessive spending for health organizations, it does not change in negative sense the nurses' themselves recognition and professional identity and above all it can facilitate the approach to the child within the hospital environment, nurses who represent the first point of reference of the child in case of hospitalization.

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