

11 The Way Forward

Once we are convinced that young children should not be separated from their parents and that all children have 'growing needs' that require attention, we shall find ourselves establishing new priorities for their care in the wards of our hospitals. Once these priorities are accepted, it is merely a matter of working through the 'details' with imagination and sensitivity.

None of us can be satisfied, though, until there is not a single persistently unhappy, homesick and uncomforted child to be found in hospital. Whilst one bewildered and uninformed parent is allowed to remain this way, whilst the training of any future doctor or nurse lacks adequate teaching of the developmental and emotional needs of children, whilst staff of any discipline find it difficult to communicate meaningfully with their young patients, no paediatric member of staff dare assume she is providing the care she should to meet the total needs of the child.

Traditionally, specialised medical and nursing care has been provided within hospitals. Although this no longer means children are separated absolutely from their parents, we should already be going further — looking for even better alternatives. It may be possible to provide 'good enough care' to keep them out of hospital altogether. Our concepts of the nursing role may undergo further change. Adaptations and alternatives may need to be sought to protect the vulnerable 'under threes' who need specialist hospital care.

Certainly it is my conviction that we have only just begun to act on the implications of present knowledge. We all have much still to learn and even more to put into practice. Meanwhile the rewards of imaginative and innovative programmes are great and, more important, our children stand to benefit from them. The future indeed is an exciting prospect.