

Letter to the Editor

06 June 2024

Dear Sirs,

I am writing with regard to the imminent naming of the new National Children's Hospital (NCH).

The NCH aims to follow best practice international standards regarding the treatment and management of children. Similarly, decisions on environment design and service delivery that will facilitate optimum positive engagement with the children attending, are rightly evidence-based. To assure better outcomes for children and for their emotional wellbeing, it is the hope of The Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI) that the same approach will apply to the naming of the hospital.

Psychological research informs us that the name of children's hospitals can directly impact the outcomes of the children attending. A child's experience of hospital can start long before they ever walk through its doors for the first time and their familiarity with the hospital brand leads to preconceptions of what their experience might be, with the evidence indicating that children's subjective experience of hospital care has a significant impact on their medical outcomes, as well as their emotional wellbeing.

Children with more negative preconceptions of a hospital brand tend to show more symptoms of distress in the run-up to, and during, their hospital stay. Children who have more positive preconceptions tend to show fewer symptoms of distress prior to and during their stay, and generally show more positive engagements with staff and treatment regimes.

Best practice also suggests that a medically appropriate, child-friendly, and engaging theme should be identified in the first instance and that, from this, a suitable name representative of the theme should be derived. The NCH theme already being rolled out by Children's Health Ireland via murals in the current hospitals, staff uniforms and promotional materials, is *Irish flora and fauna*. It is medically appropriate, child-friendly and engaging for children and, also importantly, appears to be very well regarded by children, parents, and staff. The next vital step then is that the name of the hospital is derived from this theme.

As the learned and professional body for psychology in Ireland, it is the PSI's hope that those involved in proposing and deciding on the name of the NCH, follow international best practice and the evidence, that puts children and their wellbeing at the centre. It is also important, and

their right (as per Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child), that children be involved in decision making that impacts on them. The National Paediatric Hospital Development Board's website indicates that families, children, and young people were consulted in the design phase of the hospital building which is certainly welcome, and the PSI hopes that the same will also apply to the naming process.

Whilst the naming of other institutions may be swayed by their association with historical figures, brand aspirations or Irish translations, it is critical that the evidence and best practice influence the naming of the NCH and the opportunity to potentially lessen the anguish and support the wellbeing of the children and families is not missed. The NCH is something that we are going to be rightly proud of for generations to come and credit to the current Government for delivering it. Let's ensure it gets a name that is meaningful to the children it serves and a credit to everyone who delivers it.

Yours sincerely,



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The Psychological Society of Ireland