Title: Exploring parents perceptions on the importance and feasibility of child-centred consultations of 5-11 year olds in general practice

Problem: The active involvement of children in their health care has been shown to increase compliance and improve healthcare outcomes. The British Medical Association and all health policy guidelines now advocate that children should be involved as active participants in their health care. Yet despite this, children in the 6-12 year group have little meaningful involvement in their primary care consultations, participating in less than 20% of interactions and communication. Parents play a pivotal role in enhancing or limiting child participation, acting to some degree as gatekeepers for childrens involvement in their medical care. Considering the importance of parental collaboration in GP consultations, it is surprising to discover there is only a limited body of literature discussing parental viewpoints of triadic (doctor-child-parent/guardian) communication in paediatric primary care.

The study aims to explore parents perceptions on the importance and feasibility of child-centred consultations, and to uncover parents beliefs about the factors which determine their childs involvement.

Approach: Purposive sampling was used to recruit parents from a single primary school in London. Three audio recorded focus groups were conducted in February 2019, which were subsequently transcribed verbatim, then analysed by two independent researchers. The researchers then conducted a thematic analysis of the transcripts before honing the main domains into five key themes.

Findings: While most parents acknowledged the importance of child-centred consultations, they legitimately questioned their childs ability to make decisions. Parents attributed low child participation to several factors including the perceived approachability of the GP, whether their child had met the doctor before, their childs personality and the general lack of time during consultations. Parents described their own anxiety and worries surrounding their childs health care which lead to their role as their childs advocate, decision maker and guardian during GP consultations.

Implications: This study confirms the importance of child-centred consultations and points to numerous barriers which need to be overcome in order to achieve active child involvement in consultations (as per BMA guidance). Larger studies, perhaps replicated in health and non-health care environments ought to be established to see if these findings can be generalised.

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