

Communicating concerns of NAI: A qualitative study on parents' experiences

Dr Sirkka Komulainen

Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health Science and Research Department



Background and aims

- Communicating concerns of NAI is difficult and can trigger complaints
- *"It's that awful moment where you reach a point where you have to sort of turn from being friend to foe, and it's extremely difficult to do in a way that is acceptable". (Turton & Haines, RCPCH 2006)*
- Insights into parents experiences and information needs to inform child protection training
- First research with emphasis on health professionals' communication

Methodology

- Target: 25 interviews with parents/carers
- Parents' support groups and NHS Trusts
- **Inclusion criteria:**
 - Parents aware of concerns of NAI
 - Physical injuries that were not life-threatening
 - Legal proceedings were closed/resolved
- **Narrative, semi-structured interview method**
 - Long interviews with emphasis on listening
 - In-depth data analysed in light of wider contexts

Research participants

- 12 formal interviews with parents/carers (11 cases) across UK
- Concerns due to fractures (6), bruising (3), burn (1) and possible FII(1)
- Referrals by paediatricians (8/11) and by schools (3/11)
- Most incidents occurred in the 2 years prior to recruitment to study

Communication style and content

Clear and informative way:

- *"Yeah, they took us into a little side bit, we were on the ward. The main thing was that they said it was consistent with a non-accidental injury and it was the procedure in those cases therefore to inform social services and also to do a full skeletal x-ray in those cases".*

Concern could have been 'phrased a bit better':

- *"Like 'look, I've got a problem because this kind of break is associated with abuse, we need to investigate it further. It may have been more palatable for us than 'your story is not feasible'".*

Response to communication of concern

Emotional responses

"It's early hours of the morning, we're sitting there with a x month old baby, who's not happy anyway and then they hit us with this, so of course my immediate reaction was anger. You know what I mean, when it started to dawn on to me what they were assuming, that it was down to us".

Understanding of professional duties

"I know and I do understand their point of view as well, there must be some really horrible cases and where people have actually done it, they must all note it and take the child and keep them away from the parent, that's how I would feel if you know that it's actually happening".

The child's medical care

"No other person saw child medically after that day, after he was in the hospital, nobody else. He wasn't even sent back if you have all these fractures, he wasn't even made a follow up appointment to see if the fractures were healing or anything".

- What medical examinations involve
 - How long the child has to stay in the hospital
 - What different tests involve
 - What further tests are needed
 - How long will it take to receive test results
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How to meet information needs

- Child's well-being a parental priority
 - Honest, clear, and early communication
 - Explain protocol: what is likely to happen next
 - Lay terminology
 - 'Closure letter'
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Reflections on the research process

- Building professional rapport for case recruitment
 - Parents find it difficult to relive a distressing occasion
 - Long-term anxieties
 - Parents grateful for opportunity to express views
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Reflections on communication

- Communicating any medical concerns can be challenging
- Tolerating and sharing uncertainty
- Public discourses:

"When you read stories in the press about child protection investigations you immediately think that you are under suspicion yourself and you are naturally thinking of a worst case scenario".



Conclusion

Understanding information needs and experiences:

- Parents understand professionals' role to safeguard children
 - Sensitive, non-judgmental approach
 - Give time and privacy
 - Listen to concerns and answer questions
 - Support for professionals
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 - Full report available on the RCPCH website under Child Protection Publications
 - Full project title: [Understanding Parents' Information Needs and Experiences Where Professional Concerns Regarding Non-accidental Injury Were Not Substantiated](#)
 - Authors: Dr Sirikka Komulainen & Linda Haines, RCPCH
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