Education support for hospitalised children and youth with a chronic health condition

*Dr Liza Hopkins, Research Fellow - The Royal Children’s Hospital Education Institute

Chronic illness in children and youth can have a profound impact on their education as well as their health and wellbeing. Depending on the definition of chronic illness, prevalence rates generally range from between 20% and 30%, and an estimated 10% of these miss 7 or more days of school per year. Due to advances in medical science, 90% of children with a chronic illness will live into adulthood. Beside the physiological consequences of chronic illness, chronic illness for children and youth carries secondary psychological and educational consequences, including disengagement from school, education and learning. Disengagement from school is associated with poorer academic achievement, social emotional functioning and career choices.

Education support assists children and youth who miss substantial amounts of school due to illness, in meeting their educational needs and goals while absent from school. But these education support services are not uniform across Australia. They vary by state or territory, hospital type and size (e.g. specialist paediatric or generalist hospital), site of intervention (e.g. hospital, home or regular school), and may be delivered by hospital-based school teachers, community-based school teachers, or by teachers from the students’ regular school. It is not clear if this represents diversity in education and health care policy or the absence of policy in this area.

In this presentation we will report on the findings of a research project undertaken by the Royal Children’s Hospital Education Institute that reviewed the policy and practice models of education support across Australia.