

Comic strips help children understand medical research: Tailoring the informed consent procedure to children's needs

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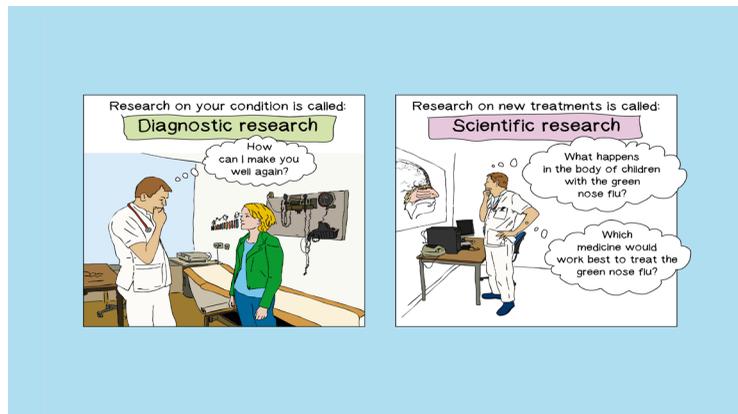


Figure 1: Panel from the comic strip © 2013 Irene Cécile

Background

Children who are about to participate in a clinical trial need to indicate their informed consent. However, research has shown that disclosure on trial information to children is seldom sufficient, due to language that is too technical and too complicated. As a result, children are left uninformed or even unaware of their participation in medical research. In order to improve the informed consent process, we have developed a comic strip for and with children explaining medical research.

Methods

The first version of the comic strip was developed by a science communicator and a professional designer in collaboration with pediatricians. The top-down approach ensured inclusion of all essential aspects of informed consent. A pretest was designed based on the results of a pilot pretest among five children in a clinical trial. In the pretest, feedback on the comic strip was collected from two school classes. The comic was adapted accordingly and retested in two other classes. Feedback was collected through structured observations, a survey and qualitative interviews.

Results

Children in the pilot pretest were positive about the format of a comic strip. They enjoyed the storyline, but indicated that there were too many pages. Also in the first round of the pretest, children appreciated the comic strip, but confirmed that it was too long. Detailed feedback on the storyline, wording and layout was collected and the comic strip was shortened, restructured and altered. Children in the second round found it easier to read and more interesting compared to children in the first round. They provided feedback on the lay-out and parts they found were hard to understand.

Conclusion

A comic strip was developed for and with children to improve the informed consent process. Hearing children is a useful and enriching step in developing information material that optimally appeals to them.

