No difference in effectiveness existed between community and hospital based interventions for children with behavioural disorders


QUESTION: In children with behavioural disorders, is a community based mental health intervention more effective and less costly than a hospital based intervention?

Design
Randomised (allocation concealed*), blinded (outcome assessors)*, controlled trial with 1 year of follow up.

Setting
2 health districts in the north of England, UK.

Patients
141 parents of children 3–10 years of age (median age 7 y; 79% boys) with behavioural disorders but normal intelligence. The children were referred to child and adolescent mental health services. 82% were followed up for 1 year.

Intervention
72 parent and children pairs were allocated to community treatment (a child and adolescent mental health service in a National Health Service facility) and 69 were allocated to hospital treatment. The 2 health districts provided the same intervention either in the community or in the hospital. Similar parental education interventions were provided in all settings.

Main outcome measures
Parents’ and teachers’ reports of the child’s behaviour, parental depression, parental criticism of the child, effect of the child’s behaviour on the family, and costs assessed at 3 months and at 1 year.

Main results
Analysis was by intention to treat. No differences existed between the groups at 3 months or at 1 year (table). The study had >90% power of detecting an effect size of 0.8 for the mean difference in parental report of child behaviour between the treatment groups. Cost measures did not differ between the groups.

Conclusion
In children with behavioural disorders, no difference in effectiveness existed between similar parental educational interventions offered in the community or in the hospital.

*See glossary.