

A hospital unlike any other

With a design inspired by the comments of a panel of children, the new Evelina Children's Hospital in London creates a welcoming, friendly environment for its young patients and their families.

Part of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust, the hospital is situated alongside the River Thames and makes the most of its views over neighbouring Lambeth Palace Gardens and Archbishop's Park.

A Children's Board of Patients was established to use the ideas and experiences of patients and local schoolchildren to form the concepts for the design and their suggestions contributed towards everything, from the snake-like shape of the corridors to the coloured symbols used to graphically mark each floor. These symbols are intended to overcome the problems of multi-language directional signs which are read by speakers of some 140 languages.

All the floors follow the same design and with its open plan layout and views over the huge glass atrium, the PICU is bright and very spacious overlooking parkland. If there were any initial concerns for staff that the open plan layout would create a noisy environment, these fears have proved largely unfounded. In fact staff, particularly junior nurses, find security in being able to see colleagues at hand should help be needed.

As with any unit, the layout of the Evelina PICU has brought up its own challenges on how to manage workload and use staff effectively. The open plan bed spaces have called on a rethink of ways to allocate staff and locate patients for safety,

The average age of the patients in the unit is around 23 months, with a range between term and 17 years. Infants under one year tend to represent over a half of the patients in PICU. Patients are grouped on the ward depending on their condition rather than on age, as this makes infections easier to manage, with separate cubicles set aside for infectious patients.

A high proportion of the infants in PICU are admitted following surgery due to congenital cardiac defects, with seasonal respiratory problems, accidental and non-accidental injuries and infectious diseases



ABOVE: One area of the Evelina PICU.

LEFT: Sister Kirsten McCulloch with two day old baby Begum.
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parents and staff appreciate the light, spacious environment in the new PICU.

To improve continuity of care, a core team of nurses are identified to care for infants staying in for over three weeks, to minimise the number of nurses families have to deal with.

As the seven bedrooms available for parents are often full up, families can also use the Ronald McDonald

house at Guy's or the Simon Hotel at St Thomas', or a spare bed will be found nearby to try to ensure parents don't have to stay off site.

Parent sitting rooms and kitchens are located on the first and second floor and a play area and play specialist are available for patients and siblings. In fact, with distractions and amusements for children designed into every aspect of the hospital, bored siblings should be one less thing for parents to worry about.

The old paediatric intensive care ward at Guy's was becoming a bit run down and bleak, so

also requiring retrieval from all over the south east of England. Babies from the NICU at St Thomas' tend to be discharged or moved to one of the floors, so it is rare for PICU to receive ex-NICU patients, apart from the babies who come via theatre or for treatment of their ongoing problems.

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Activities take place in the atrium to create a welcome distraction for young visitors. Photo: Robert Aberman.