



## The things that matter! Are you kept informed?

### *FNF* survey: experiences with doctors and dentists

Many of Families Need Fathers' (FNF) members experience significant difficulty maintaining active and healthy relationships with their children. Medical and dental treatment are areas in which non-resident parents (NRP's) often have to battle in order to keep informed and involved.

FNF conducted a survey amongst its members to gauge the sort of experiences NRP's have with doctors and dentists, findings from which can be seen below.

61 individuals responded to the questions concerning *experiences with doctors and dentists*. Findings are as follows:

#### 1. Do you feel that you are kept sufficiently involved and informed about your child(ren)'s medical and dental health?

- 84% of respondents said they did not feel that they were kept sufficiently involved and informed.
- 16% of respondents said they did feel that they were kept sufficiently involved and informed (each 'Yes' was accompanied by a comment that this was a result of fighting to be kept involved).

#### 2. Have you pushed to be kept further informed?

- 77% of respondents said they had pushed to be kept further involved.
- 23% of respondents said they had not pushed to be kept further involved.

**3. If so what response have you received? (sample)**

"I was told that only the resident parent (RP) needs to be informed."

"I was given full support but only on request."

"The doctor was not authorised to provide information to the NRP."

"I feel the need to avoid fuelling the RP's hostility."

**4. Other comments received:**

"As the mother, I was not even informed when my daughter was admitted to hospital in a near-diabetic coma."

"No doctor ever agreed to speak to me about my children, even when abuse by their alcoholic mother was evident."

"All relevant correspondence should be sent to both parents."

"There is a need for doctors/dentists to keep contact details of both parents in case of hereditary problems etc."

"Doctors need to be given a framework to work within."

"Being proactive is the key."

These findings present a highly disturbing picture, where 84% of respondents did not feel they were kept sufficiently involved and informed, and this despite 77% having fought for further information. From the comments received, it seems that doctors and dentists are reluctant to provide information due to a lack of awareness of the rights of any parent with parental responsibility to be kept informed.

Parental Responsibility (PR) confers equal status on both parents. Therefore, any NRP with PR should be dealt with by schools, doctors and dentists on an equal footing to the RP. As the Court of Appeal ruled in 1994 (Re H (A Minor) (Shared Residence) 1 FLR [1994] 717): "Since the father had a parental responsibility order, he was entitled to receive full comprehensive reports from the boy's school and full medical details from his general practitioner....(he) is entitled to all rights, duties, powers, responsibilities and authority which by law a parent of a child has in relation to the child. The father is accordingly entitled to the same rights as the mother in regard to the receipt of any reports or documents which, for example, the school or doctor may hold."

What came across strongly from the survey was the need for the NRP to be **proactive** in their requests for information. With an understanding of one's own rights, one can inform those professionals who may not have such knowledge, and this can often lead to greater communication between the parent and the teacher/doctor/dentist. Keeping involved and informed is a two-way process. The parent in question must push for this, but this pressure must be met by

professionals who have an awareness of their duties to a child and both of its parents.

For further information on dealing with medical and dental services in relation to your children you can go to the relevant title within the Law & Policy section of the FNF website: [www.fnf.org.uk](http://www.fnf.org.uk).