

Supporting the schooling of children with cancer: Families’ perspectives of the WCH’s Oncology Education Programme



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Background

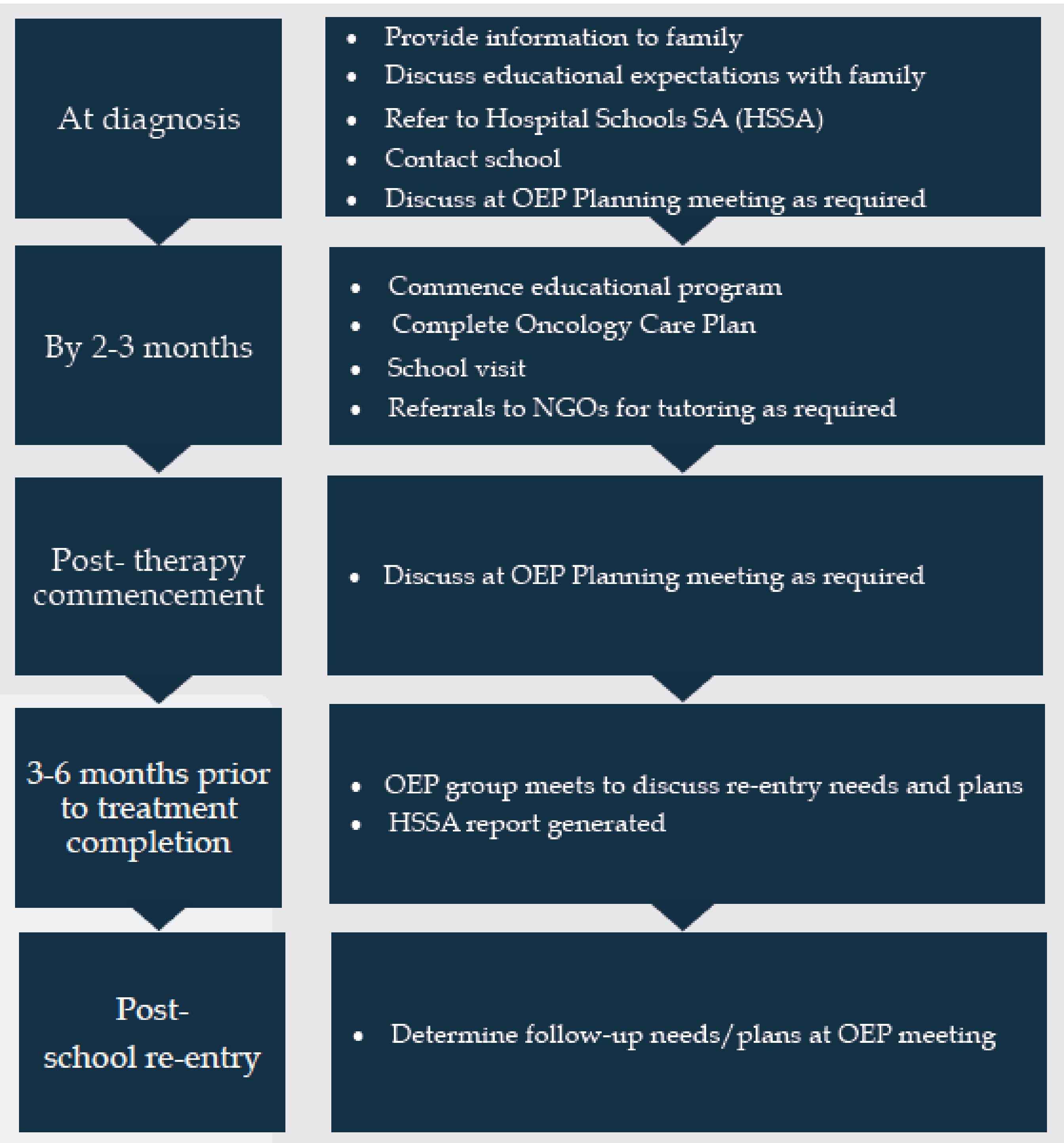
Our previous research conducted at the WCH showed that survivors of childhood cancer experience high levels of schooling difficulties, e.g., 19% repeat a grade (Roberts, Robins, Gannoni, & Tapp, 2014).

Despite recommendations for the inclusion of schooling support as standard care, few comprehensive interventions have been reported/evaluated to guide clinical practice (Thompson et al, 2015).

The WCH’s Oncology Education Programme (OEP), developed by WCH educational and clinical staff, aims to prioritise schooling during treatment, facilitate/maintain school engagement, and promote academic and social outcomes. Since 2015, the Programme has been delivered universally to children and young people from diagnosis to end of treatment, and includes face-to-face and on-line teaching with Hospital school and enrolled school staff and connection to school peers.

References :
Dellosa, S. (2019). An Oncology Education Programme: Parents’ perspectives. *M.Psych thesis*, University of Adelaide, Unpublished manuscript.
Dellosa, S., Gannoni, A., & Roberts, R. M. (2021). Maintaining Schooling for Children With Cancer During and Post Treatment: Parents’ Perspectives of a Theory-Based Program. *Continuity in Education*, 2(1), pp. 26–41. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/cie.24>
Roberts, R. M., Robins, T., Gannoni, A.F., & Tapp, H. (2014). Survivors of Childhood Cancer in South Australia attending a Late- Effects Clinic: A Descriptive Report of Psychological, Cognitive, and Academic Late- Effects. *Journal of Psychosocial Oncology*, 32:2, 152-166.
Thompson, A., Christiansen, H., Elam, M., Hoag, J., et al. (2015). Academic continuity and school reentry support as a standard of care in pediatric oncology. *Pediatric Blood Cancer*, 62, S805-S817.

Figure 1: Oncology Education Pathway



Families’ perspectives of the WCH’s Oncology Education Programme

We now report on the outcome of a recently completed and published qualitative study that explored parents’ perceptions of the Oncology Education Programme, including its delivery, impact and gaps (Dellosa, 2019; Dellosa, Gannoni, & Roberts, 2021).

Method:

Eligibility criteria: parents whose child was of kindergarten or school age during treatment (age 3-18 years); had undergone treatment for any type of cancer from May 2015- March 2018; and currently in the ‘maintenance’ phase of treatment or had completed treatment .

Participants:

Nine parents and 2 children participated in interviews about their experiences of the Programme, and 16 families completed a survey.

Results:

Six major themes were identified. These were: Parental appreciation of the Programme’s premise (i.e., that schooling is important and included in cancer care), Experiences with the Programme’s components, Burden of responsibility for parents, Communication between systems (parents, hospital and school), Perceived impacts of cancer on schooling and Other sources of schooling support.

Conclusion:

The WCH’s Oncology Education Pathway, that supports children from diagnosis with cancer to end of treatment, aims to address the high levels of schooling difficulties identified in our previous research. Building on the outcome of a recently completed consumer focused qualitative study, several quality improvements are now being developed and incorporated into the Programme. These include a Programme Brochure; the development of individualised Student Learning Profiles which are created and reviewed by the Hospital School and enrolled school teachers, students and families; the Connecting Kids programme using a digital interface to connect students with their school; and increased connection and communication with tutors.