



There are many guidelines and protocols in youth healthcare. It is not always easy for the professionals in the field to enforce them all. The Youth Academic Workshop in Twente wants to lend a helping hand.

ACADEMIC WORKSHOP IMPROVES CARE FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN

'Child abuse comes in many forms', explains researcher Annemieke Konijnendijk. 'For example, there may be physical abuse, but also emotional neglect. It is important for assistance workers to take the right steps as soon as suspicions arise. In order to help doctors and nurses in youth healthcare in this area, a guideline has been drawn up. With the introduction of the Domestic Violence and Child Abuse Reporting Code Act assistance workers involved in a family have even become obliged to take certain steps when child abuse is suspected.'

Konijnendijk, who has two appointments, one at the university and one at the youth healthcare department of the Twente Municipal Health Service is researching how the application of the guideline works in actual practice. In cooperation with the fourteen municipalities in the

region she is bringing the reporting code to the attention of schools and day nurseries. This also yields insight into the manner in which teachers and assistants apply the reporting code in the field as an obligation in addition to their regular work.

'It is important for a sound prevention of child abuse that people cooperate well in the chain', says Konijnendijk. 'Good information exchange is therefore essential. However, healthcare professionals are bound by professional secrecy: they are not at liberty to tell everything to everybody. The question is how to balance this against a duty of care.'

In addition to organisational issues technology also plays a role. Professionals in youth healthcare have been using digital files for a couple of years now. It would be good if the reporting code were included in the digital file so that

the computer shows the follow-up actions that need to be taken in case of certain signals and in which time frame. To this end, Konijnendijk, a Master student and eHealth researcher Saskia Kelders are developing a digital tool.

Konijnendijk has also distributed a questionnaire among seventeen youth healthcare organisations in the Netherlands to research which factors influence the application of the guideline. This allows her to gain knowledge at various levels.

'The knowledge of theory and practice which I link in my research may eventually lead to the adaptation of the guideline', she says. 'This way, the Youth Academic Workshop in this region will contribute to better care for vulnerable children.'

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