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Exploring ambient technology for connecting hospitalised children with school and home

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Abstract

Children undergoing long-term hospital care face problems of isolation from their familiar home and school environments. This isolation has an impact on the emotional wellbeing of the child. In this paper we report on research that explores the design of technologies that mitigate some of the negative aspects of separation, while respecting the sensitivities of the hospital, school and home contexts. We conducted design workshops with parents, teachers and hospital staff and found that there was a strong desire for mediated connection, but also a significant need to protect privacy and avoid disruption. In response we designed a novel technology that combined an ambient presence with photo-sharing to connect hospitalised children with schools and families. This paper reports on the field trial of the technology. The research provides new insights into how technology can support connectedness and provides a foundation for contributing to the wellbeing of children and young people in sensitive settings.

Keywords

hospitalised children; social connectedness; wellbeing; ambient technology; awareness; photo sharing

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