EVIDENCE BASED INTERVENTION PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN WITH CHRONIC ILLNESS AND THEIR PARENTS ARE NEEDED

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Background
Children with a chronic illness (CI) are twice as likely to develop psychosocial problems as healthy children. To treat and prevent these problems a standardized group-based intervention program was developed in the Emma Kinderziekenhuis AMC, called ‘Op Koers’. Based on cognitive-behavioural principles, children learn to use skills to help them cope with the consequences of their disease. In 2009 a multicentre- randomised controlled trial started to study the effectiveness of ‘Op Koers’.

Methods
• 1134 children with CI, and their parents, were invited to participate through an information letter, posters and pamphlets available at the clinics.
• During the first year 146 children applied, aged 8.0 till 18.9 (M = 12.15, SD = 2.77).
• Children and parents completed online questionnaires to assess baseline psychosocial functioning. Parents completed the ‘Child Behaviour Checklist’ (CBCL) and children the ‘Youth Self Report’ (YSR, 11-18).

Results
• Participants reported significant higher average scores for psychological problems compared to the norm group (p < .05).
• Parents (CBCL, n=146) reported significantly more internalizing and externalizing problems in their child, children (YSR, n=83) only reported more internalizing problems.
• 61% of the parents reported their child to be in the clinical or sub clinical range, compared to 23% based on self report.

Conclusion
There is a need for psychosocial interventions for children with CI, because:
• A substantial percentage of children and parents, who applied for ‘Op Koers’, reported high levels of psychosocial problems.
• Parents reported more problems than their children. It is possible that parents perceive their child as more vulnerable.
• Many Dutch hospitals were interested to implement ‘Op Koers’.
• To adequately treat and prevent psychosocial problems in children with CI, evidenced based intervention programs for parents and children are needed.