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## Making sense of psychological phenomena in a medical context

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Between 2-20% of children presenting to health care providers are now commonly experiencing medically unexplained symptoms, or functional symptoms such as severe headaches, gastrointestinal pain and unsteady gait, that cannot be explained by disease pathology. Children and families present with this problem often has heightened levels of anxiety, mistrust in the medical system and feelings dubious about how the psychological medicine team could help treat their child's physical symptoms. The diagnosis of medically unexplained symptoms is one of exclusion and thus children have typically been seen by numerous doctors and investigated for countless organic processes before they are referred to the psychological medicine consultation liaison team. Children and families often feel frustrated with medical professionals because they have not been given a clear diagnostic explanation for their child's symptoms, leaving the family with more questions, uncertainty and anxiety about their child's health and prognosis. One of the teams at the Children's Hospital at Westmead have attempted to meet this therapeutic challenge by imposing some procedural guidelines around the referral process – such as ensuring children are medically cleared prior to assessment, asking medical teams communicate clearly with children and families about the outcome of their medical investigations, and the reason for referral to psychological medicine. Additionally, the team has developed guidelines around the initial family assessment that aim to meet the family in their uncertainty, with their focus on physical symptoms and respond with empathy to their frustration with the medical system. The aim of this study is to provide a formulation to families about their child's symptoms in a way that the family can comprehend and that provides them with a way to connect the mind and the body. In doing so, the team attempts to alleviate the child and the family's anxiety by giving them a clear explanation and clear treatment plan.

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