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1 YEAR EXPERIENCE

Three Peas of Child Life; Passion, Play and Possibilities

Can you tell me a little bit about your hospital and the units you cover?

I work in medical imaging at our satellite campus. Our team has about 16 child life specialists total but there are only 2 of us at the testing center; the ED child life specialist and myself. So while medical imaging is my focus, I also cover the ED in the mornings and the clinics. The clinics I work in the most are ortho, allergy, and phys-med for Botox injections.

What's your typical unit census and about how many patients do you see per day?

Everyday is different, but my average day consists of seeing 5-10 patients. Patients that are there for MRI will often take at least an hour of my time between preparation for their scan and then support during the MRI.

What does your average day look like?

I work Monday-Friday, 9:30am-6:00pm. My day starts with checking emails and creating a schedule for myself. When I create my schedule, I always assess my patients by looking at their chart to see if they've seen child life before and their experiences with medical procedures. Working in the outpatient world, I don't meet my patients until they arrive for their procedure so I have to use other means to assess their coping. I then write my name next to my patient's appointment on the medical imaging schedule in the tech area so the staff knows which patients I will be supporting. I try to touch base with the techs about the patients we are treating together so that we can work together as a team to provide the best possible care. In the afternoon, I make preparation calls to MRI patients who are 11-years-old or younger. These calls are another way that I assess my patients and also set them up for successful non-sedated MRIs by encouraging parents to practice with their child before their MRI appointment. During these preparation phone calls, I talk to their patients about how they think their child will do holding still for their scan, I let them know the length of the scan, discuss the IV if they are scheduled to get one, and answer any questions the parents might have about their MRI. I then send an email with videos of the MRI and the noises that the machine makes.

What is your favorite distraction item and how do you use it?

Definitely bubbles! Bubbles catch pretty much everyone's attention and also make the room less intimidating. When patients are anxious, bubbles also encourage deep breathing. Bubbles are also great because they fit in my pocket so they are always with me. You never know when you'll suddenly get a call to support a patient and I might not have time to grab my iPad or distraction bag.

What's the best part about your job?

Getting a patient through a procedure that parents and staff doubted they would be able to do. When many of my younger patients try MRIs without sedation, parents and staff alike are skeptical if they'll be successful. My hospital lets any child try without sedation and if they can't do it, then the patient is rescheduled at a later date with sedation and the family isn't charged for that first attempt. Getting a 4-year-old through a 45-minute MRI without sedation is such a great feeling!

What's the hardest part in doing your job?

Being with patients when they are in pain and none of my distraction techniques are working. In those moments, it's important to not give up and stay with the child. Although it may not always seem like it, something as simple as holding their hand and validating their pain can be so important. And when the procedure is finished, you're there to help them return to baseline.

What's a facet of your job that people wouldn't expect?

I spend a lot of time on the computer preparing to support patients. Between assessing them in their charts, making phone calls, sending emails and charting my encounters, I do a lot more computer work than I expected when I was in school.

What's something you wish you knew when you started on this unit?

How restricted my interventions would be because of positioning. In medical imaging we don't have many opportunities for comfort positions as patients must be positioned in very particular ways for x-rays, CTs, and MRIs. Choices are hard to find.

Do you have anything else you'd like to share about your job, tips for students, or thoughts?

Get a wide variety of experiences because it really is helpful later in your career! I did my volunteer hours/practicum in large hospitals and my internship in a 30-bed Peds unit within an adult hospital. Getting the different hospital experiences prepared me for my current position as part of a large Child Life team but working alone at the outpatient testing center. The field of Child Life is competitive and finding a job is hard work, but so worth it when you see that 4-year-old get through their IV start with no tears!

