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1 YEAR EXPERIENCE

“Purpose fuels passion”

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

I work at a children's hospital within an adult facility, however, we are moving across the street to a freestanding children's hospital this coming fall. Currently we have 80 pediatric beds that includes General Pediatrics, Med/Surg, PICU, UCU, and Hematology/Oncology and a Pediatric Emergency Department. We also have a St. Jude Children's Research Hospital Affiliate Clinic – which is one of only nine affiliate clinics in the country. I cover General Pediatrics and Inpatient Hem/Onc.

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

General Pediatrics has 23 beds and inpatient Hem/Onc has 10 beds. Generally both units are not at full capacity so I can see just about everyone each day. When both units are full, prioritizing becomes crucial in determining who I will see. Volunteers are incredibly helpful in rounding on my old admits just to check in and meet those normalization needs.

What does your average day look like?

Clock in, sign in to EPIC, print census, highlight new admits, write in who was seen by the Emergency Department specialist, go to multi-disciplinary rounds/huddle, head back to the office for chart review/prioritizing and then it's off to see new patients!

Prioritization: new oncology diagnosis or end of life, scheduled procedures, difficulty coping/noncompliance or uncooperative, new admits.

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

I love bubbles for the toddler age. I had a patient a few weeks ago that holds his breath for pokes to make himself pass out and was just generally a challenging kid to work with for an IV. I used bubbles as distraction but also as a deep breathing exercise to help prevent him from making himself pass out. He was tearful, just as any three-year-old for an IV, but he didn't pass out and coped very well! I also like a look-and-find book or rice jar for school-age, and conversation as distraction for older kids.

What's the best part about your job?

I love having kids that are excited about the hospital and have super awesome questions, but I also love having the opportunity to work with a patient over an extended period of time and see my interventions help them go from anxious and timid to totally feeling in control and building those therapeutic relationships.

What's the hardest part in doing your job?

End of life is always difficult for many different reasons. No matter how many times you are in that type of situation it is always different and as a newer CCLS myself, it's hard finding the appropriate and supportive words to say, when to say them, and when to offer memory making.

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

Surprisingly not many people realize how involved child life is with grief and bereavement. Also unexpected parts of our job could be support for pill swallowing, suppository and enema support, and adult consults (children of adults that are end of life). I've been consulted before for a patient that was scared to urinate once his catheter was removed and the nurse requested child life.

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

Especially with Hem/Onc, I wish I knew how often there are new oncology diagnoses and how quickly the timeline flows; from admit, testing and diagnosis, to transfer to St. Jude in Memphis via ambulance – it can be as little as 24 hours and if that seems quick for a CCLS to provide a wide range of support/interventions/education, imagine how overwhelmed the patient and family feel receiving a cancer diagnosis 24 hours after they came to the hospital for a fever or a lab result that was just a little off.

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

I always encourage students to find a good mentor to provide you with honest, yet encouraging, support and guidance. I have seen several students wanting to get into child life but have poor support from their colleges or no support at all. Becoming a CCLS can seem impossible if you don't have the proper guidance. I love my job and am excited to come to work every single day. Some days are slow, some are crazy busy, some are very sad, and others are really fun. I love my nurses, doctors, coworkers, volunteers, students, and I love my patients and families. Every day is different in this job and I can't imagine doing anything else!

