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2 YEARS EXPERIENCE

THAT WHICH IS MEANT FOR YOU WILL NOT PASS YOU BY.

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

I work in a 20-bed pediatric unit that is located within an adult hospital. Our unit has a mixture of inpatients, outpatients and infusion patients that come to our unit daily. Child Life services is currently available in our Pediatric/Adolescent Inpatient Unit, Ambulatory Surgery, Radiology Department, Neurology, Emergency Department, Infant Special Care Unit, Adult Cancer Center, Adult Intensive Care Unit and other areas upon child life referral.

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

10-20 patients per day and I usually try and see all of them if I am able to.

What does your average day look like?

Everyday is different which is one of my favorite things about my job. Some days I will find myself "eating" bubbles before surgery to make a toddler laugh, and driving kids in electric cars to the OR while other days I am helping siblings express grief and sadness with their parent's difficult diagnosis. Another day, I may be working with a teen with high anxiety levels and encouraging them to develop new coping strategies related to a new diagnosis or in the ED helping a child who is in for self-harm and just needs a listening ear and a deck of UNO cards, or bringing miniature therapy horses into the hospital for a quick visit. :) My average day is centered on helping kids thrive at the hospital and will do whatever it takes to make sure that happens.

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

Dimpl by Fat Brain Toys is my favorite distraction tool that I use with 10 month to 4 year olds and sometimes fidgety teens. It is a lightweight, colorful, silicone bubble popper with a variety of circles that allow children to pop the bubbles in and out. Fancy, never-ending bubble wrap basically. It can help block little eyes during blood draws and provide a competition for four year olds of who can pop the bubbles the fastest.

What's the best part about your job?

It's very hard to pick just one thing that is the very best, but I would just have to say having the unique opportunity to, for a day or a few weeks, enter into a child's story and change what is often a very unfamiliar, scary environment; instead helping them enter into an environment where they are heard, loved, and cared for so deeply and feel in control of every bit of their hospital stay. I love hearing from kids that they want to stay and play and are not ready to go home yet.

What's the hardest part in doing your job?

Like many others probably experience in this field, the busy days where I wish I could cut myself into pieces and spread myself to four different units that all need me at the same time. The hardest part is when children are missed and despite prioritizing patients you still feel like you let down a patient or family for not being able to help them due to lack of staffing or time.

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

The benefit of being located in a small pediatric unit in a large adult hospital is that it is easier to have the opportunity to do things that may not be as easy in a larger children's hospital. On an average day, I try my best to see all of my patients that come through our unit on a daily basis. I also get the opportunity to interact and partner with a variety of staff members in different departments around the hospital on a more regular basis, present in departmental meetings and advocate for child life needs, always.

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

No matter what, there's always more that I could be doing on any given day, which is a good motivator but can also be daunting at times. Especially when I have had to learn how to say "no" instead of "yes and" during days where I don't have the time to go and do one more consult or stay late because there's always something more I could be doing whether clinical or administrative task. I have learned that the best thing to do is think about how I can make the biggest difference with just this day and do everything I can to make sure every patient and family member feels understood, cared for, and safe.

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

Be a learner. We have such wonderful resources at our fingertips these days, whether your favorite Instagram child life page or child life websites, but remember one of the most important parts for your journey is learning for yourself what will help you best during your student experiences. That will happen through listening, asking questions, and observing a variety of child life specialists in different rotations. I encourage you all to really lean into your supervisor and child life specialists during your rotations and have them share with you their knowledge of what they have learned and stuck with over the years of working in the child life field.

