



# Nicole Boik, MS, CGCS

BACHELOR OF ARTS IN PSYCHOLOGY; MASTER OF SCIENCE IN CHILD LIFE,  
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2.5 YEARS EXPERIENCE

"IT IS A HAPPY TALENT TO KNOW HOW TO PLAY." - RALPH WALDO EMERSON

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

I work in radiation oncology in a large outpatient oncology facility that provides care and support to both pediatric and adult patients. Our building is situated on a large medical campus that also contains a small pediatric unit and PICU. A fun fact about our facility is that it is the only one in the world that offers every radiation treatment modality under one roof!

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

Our department treats over 120 patients per day, but only a small portion of that is pediatric patients. We average between 7 and 10 pediatric patients on treatment at a time, in addition to other pediatric visits for consultations and things.

## What does your average day look like?

My day typically starts off pretty early as we have children that receive anesthesia for their daily treatment. I'll provide procedural support for port access typically once per week, and then the rest of my time with our little ones consists of normalization activities and medical play. The remainder of my day revolves around our pediatric patients that do not receive anesthesia for their treatment; this may include a practice session for a 6yo patient aiming to complete upcoming treatment without anesthesia, a discussion of effective coping strategies with a patient already on treatment, checking in with an adolescent that is rocking their treatment but looking for activities to do outside of treatment, etc.

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

My favorite distraction items are all of my squishy/fidget toys that my patients can choose from to keep their hands and/or minds busy during their daily treatment.

## What's the best part about your job?

The best part of my job is getting to watch children go through the radiation treatment process and gradually become more comfortable and confident to the extent that, by the time they're done, they are walking in and out of the treatment room on their own and making their daily treatment look like a piece of cake! There's a little bonus when our radiation therapists say things like, "Wow, they're doing better than our adult patients."

## What is the hardest part in doing your job?

The two hardest moments in my job are when we are treating a child for palliative reasons during the end-of-life period and when we hear that a past patient has passed away. Getting to see our patients for follow-up visits every few months is fantastic, but that also means we hear the bad news when they pass away.

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

Many people don't expect all of the different coping strategies that are available to a child receiving radiation treatment! When people think of radiation treatment, they typically compare it to an imaging study where you have to lay perfectly still and you may/may not have music. In our radiation department, children can choose from various countdowns during their treatment, various audio to listen to (books, their own recordings, music, movies), someone to hold their hand when possible, a fidget item (if so, what kind of fidget item), videos on the tablet if possible, and so much more!

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

I wish I had some sort of knowledge of radiation treatment when I started. Radiation oncology is such a complex area because the site that is being treated and the modality being used to administer that treatment can vary widely, making it difficult to adequately prepare and support a child. Now-a-days, I can pretty accurately guess what each child will need to know, but I still always check with different members of my team first.

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

I guess a tip for students would be to be confident not just in your knowledge, but in your abilities to gain more knowledge! There's always going to be something we don't know, but there's always going to be a way for us to learn what we don't know.

