

Child Life Services: *A prescription for play*

When most people think of the Child Life Services department at Children's Hospital Boston, they think of toy-filled play rooms. And while their work is play-based, Child Life Specialist's roles extend far beyond toys and games, to everything from community outreach and tutoring to pain management and preparing children for surgery.

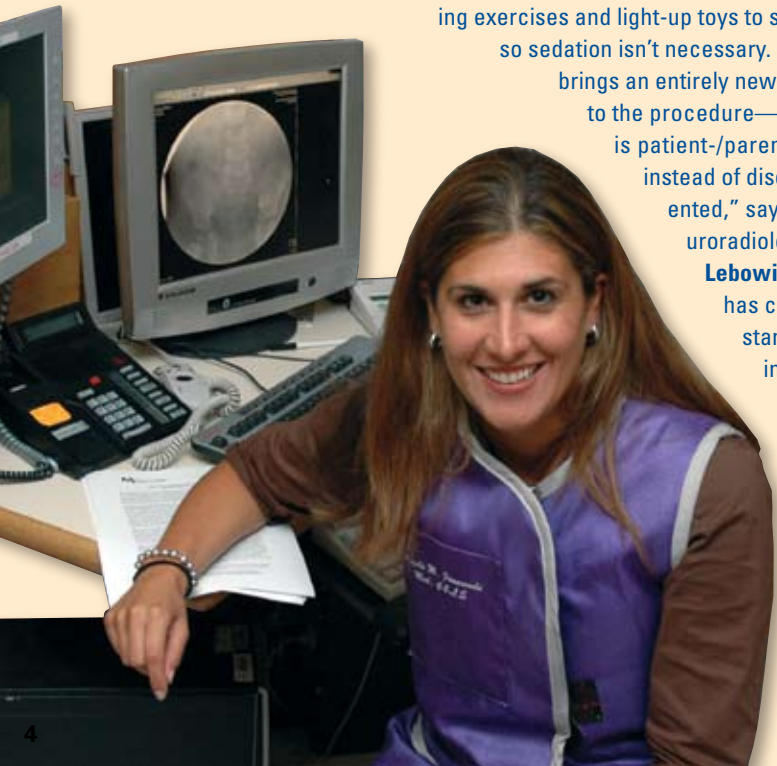
"Child Life Specialists help bridge the gap between home and the hospital and help patients adjust to the hospital environment," says **Myra Fox**, who has directed the department for 30 years. "We work closely with the whole multidisciplinary care team, especially nurses, to ensure that children get the best possible care."

"Child Life Specialists make it possible for children to stay children during hospitalization and times of crisis," says **Susan Shaw**, RN, MSN, director of Clinical Operations.

Here, *Children's News* introduces you to six of the 25 Child Life Specialists, whose jobs demonstrate the range of services their department provides.

Pre-planning and distraction techniques

Angela Franceschi's relationships with her patient families begin before they even step foot into Radiology for testing or procedures. She calls parents to explain what will happen to their child so they, in turn, can explain it to the children. "It's crucial to clear up any misconceptions before they walk through the door," she says. During one procedure, called a Pediatric Voiding Cystourethrogram, the patient must remain still during the placement of a catheter. Many hospitals give anesthesia to ensure the safety of the insertion, but Angela uses coping and distraction techniques (everything from breathing exercises and light-up toys to storytelling) so sedation isn't necessary. "Angela brings an entirely new dimension to the procedure—one that is patient-/parent-oriented instead of disease-oriented," says pediatric urologist **Robert Lebowitz, MD**. "It has changed the standard of care in pediatric radiology."



Education and pain management

Suzanne Graca has been a Child Life Specialist for 18 years and enjoys sharing her wealth of knowledge with students interested in the field. She teaches three classes a semester in Wheelock College's Child Life program and assists the interns who come to Children's each semester. A major component of her teachings is pain management. "No one wants to inflict pain on children," says Graca. "As Child Life Specialists, we try to minimize children's perception of pain with distraction techniques that help relax them during painful procedures like IV insertions."

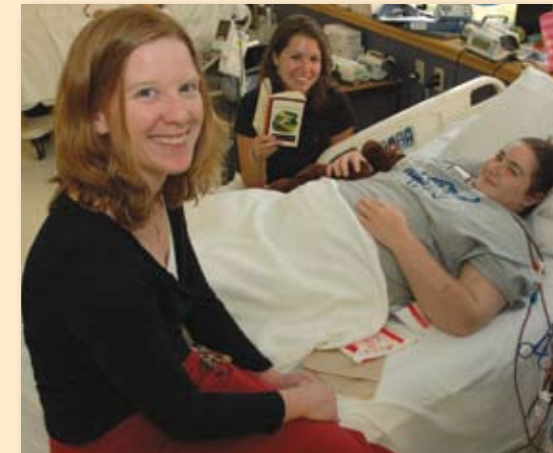
Community safety

Addie Rosenstock works in the Children's Hospital Primary Care Center, where, among other things, she organizes safety and injury prevention programs for the community. Her duties include distributing car seats and bike helmets and teaching people the proper way to use them. "It's nice to work at a hospital where you can educate parents and provide them with the equipment to keep their kids safe," she says. Rosenstock also assists with the Young Parents Program, which, in partnership with the Social Work Department, provides health care for teen parents and their young children.



Preparing for surgery

Surgery can be frightening for anyone, but especially for children, so **Hayley Bray** (left) from the Pre-Op Clinic, and **Milagros Lopez-Ramirez** (right) from Day Surgery, are there to make sure the process is as comfortable as possible. Bray does pre-op teaching with medical play and a preparation book and takes kids on tours of the units they'll be staying in overnight. "It's great for the family to have a familiar face when they get up there," she says. And on the day of surgery, Bray keeps kids entertained as they wait. Lopez-Ramirez fills a similar role in Day Surgery, helping kids understand what will happen to them. Often, she's called into the exam room to calm a crying child with a kind word or a toy, and takes the time to tell the child what each person in the room does during the surgery.



Keeping up with school

To patients who need dialysis at Children's, **Johanna Black's** is a familiar face. Seeing a patient three times a week for up to five hours at a time allows her to become very involved in each child's life. One of Black's main goals is to keep kids on track in school while they're undergoing dialysis and awaiting a kidney transplant. She does this by working with school systems to find tutors, as well as going to schools to talk to the patient's classmates about what their friend has been going through. Black works closely with the entire dialysis team to keep the children's lives as normal as possible. "I don't want everything to be about the hospital. We're doing all we can to give them their childhoods."

Medical play

Children are afraid of the unknown, so Child Life Specialists use medical play to help prepare them for surgeries or procedures. Here are a few of the tools they use:

- The doll and doctor kit helps children see the types of tools that will be used during a procedure.
- Medical art allows patients to use medical equipment, such as stethoscopes and tongue depressors, to create artwork. Taking them out of context makes them less scary for the child.
- Medical fantasy play helps children work through issues that are bothering them using regular toys. Sometimes a child will play with a farm set and the farmer ends up performing a procedure on a cow's leg. In this way, the patient can deal with his or her medical issues in a non-threatening way.
- Indirect medical play uses items like puzzles or games with medical themes to help make patients comfortable with medical equipment and terminology.
- Mr. Vein, a towel wrapped in tourniquet material that simulates an arm, is used one-on-one with older children to show them how needles and IVs are inserted. Once they feel some control over the process, their fear is diminished.