

HOSPITAL PLAY NEWS

LIVE FROM THE SCENE

Hospital Play Helps Address Paediatric Patients' Emotions

JUST FOR THE RECORD

Integrating Electronic Technology
Hospital Play Services Evolve
with the Times



SEAMLESS PROFESSIONAL PARTNERS

Children learn about “people who help us” from a young age. Healthcare professionals, namely doctors and nurses, are among them. In fact, hospital play specialists also help paediatric patients in hospitals.

The Roles of Professionals in Hospital



Hospitals have a team of healthcare professionals with defined roles and responsibilities to care for patients, including doctors and nurses who specialize in treating patients, conducting medical examinations, and providing nursing care. In Western paediatric wards, hospital play specialists (also known as child life specialists) are set up specifically to address paediatric patients' physical and emotional needs and provide appropriate holistic care for them.

Hospital play specialists assess paediatric patients' psychological and physiological needs using child-friendly methods in the paediatric wards where they are stationed. They then communicate with healthcare professionals and intervene with hospital play to help children understand medical procedures and soothe their emotions, alleviate their anxiety caused by hospitalization, thus making the treatment process smoother and more effective. Hospital play specialists and healthcare professionals work together as partners to provide comprehensive care for paediatric patients for the sake of their well-being.

At present, our hospital play specialists serve as honorary staff to provide services at Caritas Medical Centre, Princess Margaret Hospital and Prince of Wales Hospital, as well as online services at Yan Chai Hospital, through self-raised funding. At Hong Kong Children's Hospital, we operate on a voluntary basis, same as other social welfare organizations.

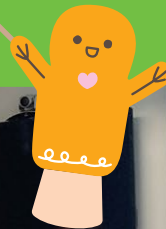




In the process of rendering hospital play services, the hospital play specialist first communicates with healthcare professionals to understand the paediatric patient's medical procedures and physical and mental conditions. After developing a customized hospital play plan, the specialist uses play to connect with the paediatric patient and establish a relationship. She then helps the child to understand medical procedures and alleviate anxiety through hospital play, including preparation play, distraction play and medical play. Throughout this process, the hospital play specialist continuously communicates with healthcare professionals to monitor the patient's latest conditions, discussing and adjusting the next stages of the hospital play plan.

The role of the hospital play specialist includes to:

-  **1** Communicate with healthcare professionals to understand the paediatric patient's physical and mental conditions
-  **2** Connect with the paediatric patient and initially get acquainted with him/her
-  **3** Examine, analyze, and assess the paediatric patient's needs and develop a hospital play plan, incorporating normal play
-  **4** Implement the plan, intervening in the medical process through hospital play
-  **5** Cooperate with healthcare professionals to support the paediatric patient in completing medical procedures
-  **6** Follow up, integrate, and assess the paediatric patient's latest conditions with healthcare professionals



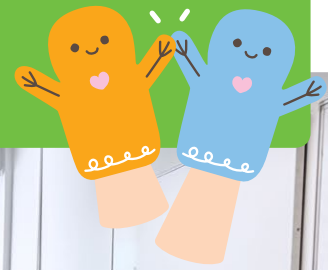
Healthcare professionals and hospital play specialists are equal professionals with their own areas of expertise and defined roles. It requires mutual understanding of each other's work and objectives to build trust between both parties and achieve smooth collaboration. This allows them to work together to provide holistic and comprehensive medical care for paediatric patients.

Whenever a new service is launched, hospital play specialists meet with healthcare professionals from the relevant wards/departments to discuss the goals and expected outcomes of the collaboration. They also carefully review the workflow to ensure that the paediatric patient receives appropriate play services without interfering with one another's work, thereby ensuring the smooth completion of treatment while addressing the child's emotional needs.

Before the service begins, hospital play specialists will provide an introduction of hospital play to all healthcare professionals, ensuring each partner understands the service and its objectives. Without a doubt, hospital play specialists need to be familiar with basic medical information related to the relevant diseases, hence, healthcare professionals also provide instruction and guidance. Once the service is implemented, hospital play specialists will regularly review the collaboration format and workflow with healthcare professionals, making adjustments whenever necessary.



Through the collaboration with hospital play specialists, healthcare professionals deepen their understanding of hospital play and recognize its importance to children. Hence, healthcare professionals will proactively invite hospital play specialists to share techniques and tips on interacting with paediatric patients. On the other hand, hospital play specialists will actively learn medical knowledge from healthcare professionals to ensure that the medical/ preparation play is provided in an accurate and appropriate manner. Healthcare professionals and hospital play specialists continuously learn from one another, striving to be seamless partners in promoting overall well-being of paediatric patients.



Through hospital play, paediatric patients learn more about the treatments and can complete them with confidence. This brings great comfort to hospital play specialists. Hence, hospital play specialists also put great efforts in creating simulated medical tools and child-friendly information about various diseases and treatments.

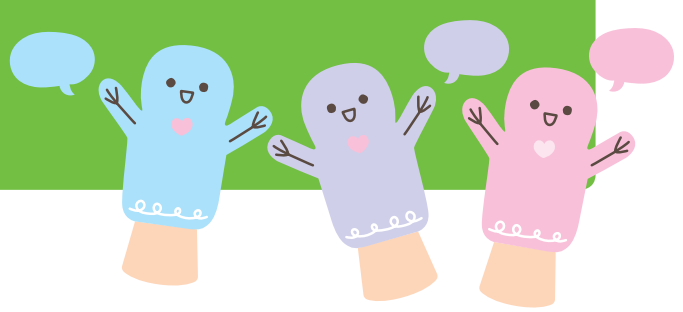
In recent years, thanks to our continuous efforts, healthcare professionals' awareness of child-friendly practices has greatly increased. They even proactively invite us to create children's versions of medical leaflets. Apart from participating in content development, they contribute to designing hospital play and providing hand-drawn illustrations of medical procedures. Healthcare professionals also solicit feedback from paediatric patients before making revisions of the leaflets. Their respect for children and interactions with paediatric patients fully demonstrate their professionalism and their holistic, child-centered approach of caring for paediatric patients.

Furthermore, healthcare professionals go beyond treating and caring for patients and actively participate in various activities whenever possible. They act not just as professionals in medical uniforms, but also as performers, play leaders, and caring playmates, creating a relaxed and enjoyable environment for paediatric patients.

Getting sick is uncontrollable, and the recovery process can be challenging and difficult. However, a positive environment can foster a positive atmosphere. Healthcare professionals and hospital play specialists collaborate, upholding their respective professional standards while working together to become "playful healthcare professionals". They often communicate and interact with paediatric patients through play, enabling them to face illnesses and hospitalization with smiles and courage in "playful wards" and "playful hospitals".



Mutual Appreciation



The energetic, compassionate and innovative team from Playright hospital play service is our close partner in the Magnetic Resonance Suite.

The service enables both children and their parents to actively participate, better understand the examination process, foster empowerment and reduce anxiety. Hospital play specialists use various tools such as toy models, board games and devices to explain the details of the scan. They also train children in techniques such as breath-holding, provide support during intravenous cannulation for contrast agents and accompany the child in the scan room for comfort and reassurance.



Dr Elaine Kan
Chief of Service,
Department of Radiology,
Hong Kong Children's Hospital



Hospital Play Specialists always provide support to our little clients who are undergoing medical treatment such as blood taking.

They create a safe and nurturing environment where children can express their emotions, fears and concerns through play and help them to process their feelings related to their illness, treatment or hospital stay, even when children find it difficult to articulate them verbally.



Ms Ada Chan Yuk-ming
Immediate Past President,
Hong Kong Paediatric Nurses Association



Hospital play specialists are passionate, and this service is extremely meaningful.

We hope it can be popularized so that more paediatric patients can receive support and enjoy a happy childhood.



Healthcare Professional

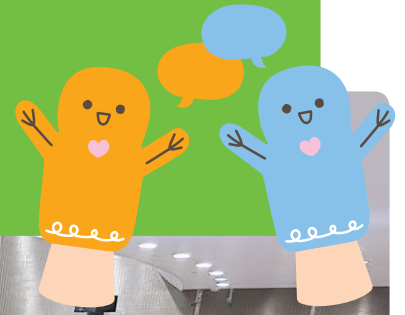


Hospitalization can be boring and depressing for children. We are thankful to have hospital play services to ease the gloomy atmosphere in wards, reduce children's anxiety, and help paediatric patients feel secure and happy through play.



Healthcare Professional

Sharing of Professional Knowledge and Experiences



Transforming a hospital into a child-friendly setting is not something that can be achieved overnight. Besides environmental adjustments, the ward culture and staff attitudes are even more crucial. Creating a child-friendly environment in hospitals and paediatric wards has always been a goal of hospital play specialists.

Thanks to the arrangements made by various collaborating departments within the hospital, hospital play specialists regularly conduct hospital play workshops for newly recruited or intern healthcare professionals. These workshops guide these newcomers to learn methods for friendly communication with paediatric patients, so they better understand the children's physical and mental conditions. They are also able to appreciate the need of collaborating with hospital play specialists, and the resultant mutually beneficial approach which allows for the provision of child-friendly and holistic healthcare services to paediatric patients.



Thanks to the coordination and facilitation of medical staff, hospital play specialists have been guest lecturing at tertiary institutions to introduce hospital play services to nursing students for many years. This not only helps raise awareness of the service but also enables nursing students to understand the needs of paediatric patients, encouraging them to pursue a career in paediatric care.



In addition to the close collaboration with healthcare professionals, we also hope to make those unfamiliar with hospital play aware of its importance, including professionals in the medical-and-paediatric-related fields. Hospital play specialists will therefore actively participate in activities organized by various specialist organizations, proactively sharing the effectiveness of hospital play services with professionals with the ultimate goal of achieving child-friendly healthcare in mind. Hospital play specialists believe that even small changes in each professional role will bring significant benefits to paediatric patients and their families.



Hospital Play Helps Address Paediatric Patients' Emotions

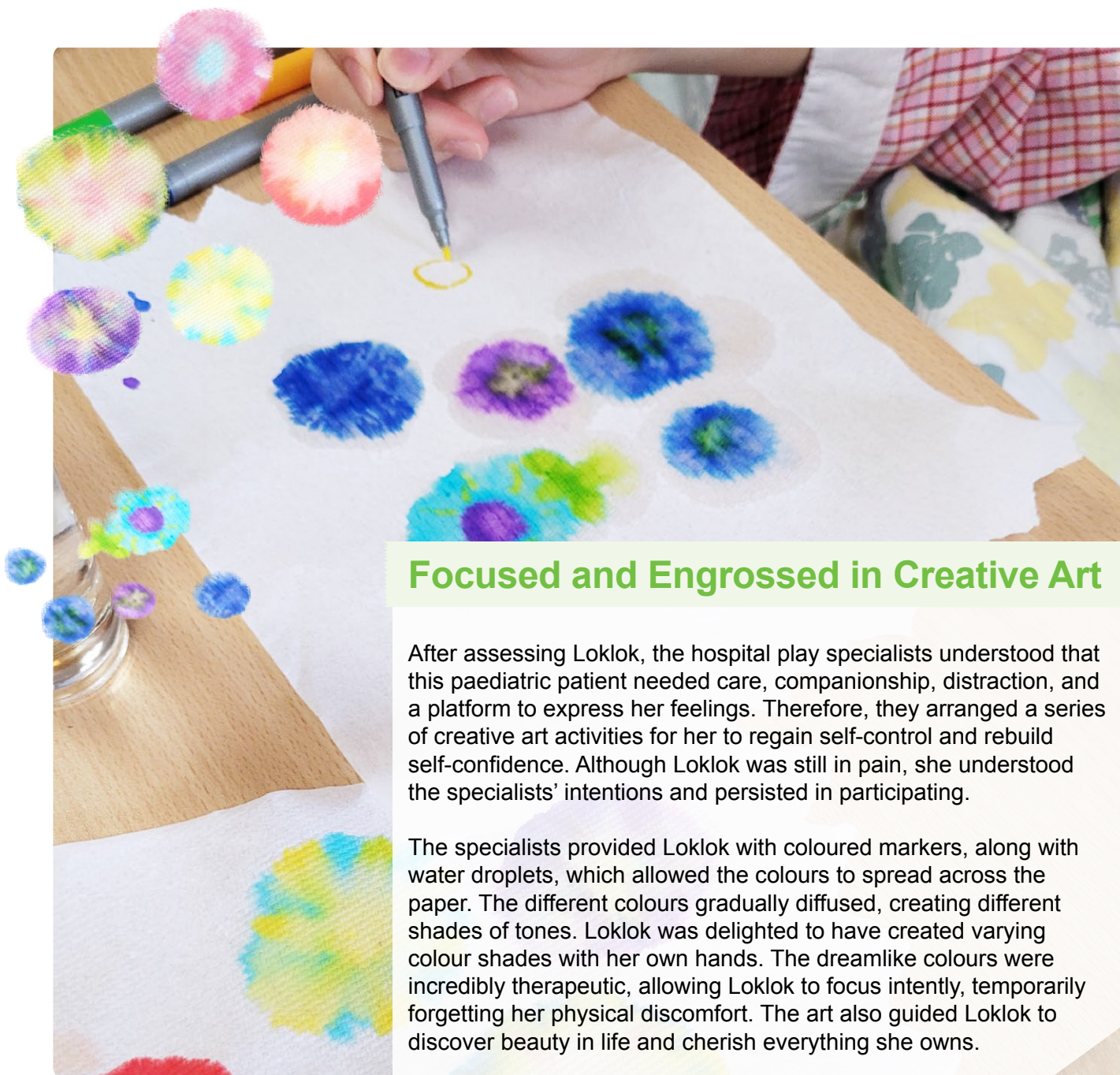
When people are sick, the golden rule is to take medication and rest for the best recovery. For paediatric patients, hospital play is equally important as it brings happy moments and strength to them during the battle against illnesses. Based on this, Playright hospital play specialists take care of the children's emotional needs in the hospital wards day by day, believing that addressing paediatric patients' emotional concerns facilitate effective treatments and recovery.

For Loklok (alias), simple creative arts & crafts activities are like a painkiller, bringing special meaning to her days of struggling to fight against her disease.

Diagnosed with rhinovirus infection and hospitalized, Loklok suffered from fever, upper respiratory discomfort, a runny nose, headaches, and other ailments, making her lethargic and unwilling to speak. Knowing Loklok's low spirits, the hospital play specialists stayed by her side, gradually building a relationship with her. However, Loklok did not know how to express her feelings. Therefore, the hospital play specialists handed Loklok paper and pen, guiding her to draw a human-shaped doll, and pointing out the pain points one by one. It turned out that Loklok not only had headaches, chest pains, but also stomachaches, foot pains, and bladder pains.



Feeling the care from the hospital play specialists, Loklok became more willing to recount her experiences, including the unfortunate incident where she was accidentally hit by a car while crossing the road, suffered a fracture and admitted to the hospital. She described the accident as a brush with death, which was painful and horrifying. She also shared that she felt lonely and miserable during the days spent in the adult ward with her cast on. But everything changed to the opposite when she met the hospital play specialists in the paediatric ward, where she could play cards and do magic tricks with them. The experience was a world apart from the orthopaedic ward.



Focused and Engrossed in Creative Art

After assessing Loklok, the hospital play specialists understood that this paediatric patient needed care, companionship, distraction, and a platform to express her feelings. Therefore, they arranged a series of creative art activities for her to regain self-control and rebuild self-confidence. Although Loklok was still in pain, she understood the specialists' intentions and persisted in participating.

The specialists provided Loklok with coloured markers, along with water droplets, which allowed the colours to spread across the paper. The different colours gradually diffused, creating different shades of tones. Loklok was delighted to have created varying colour shades with her own hands. The dreamlike colours were incredibly therapeutic, allowing Loklok to focus intently, temporarily forgetting her physical discomfort. The art also guided Loklok to discover beauty in life and cherish everything she owns.



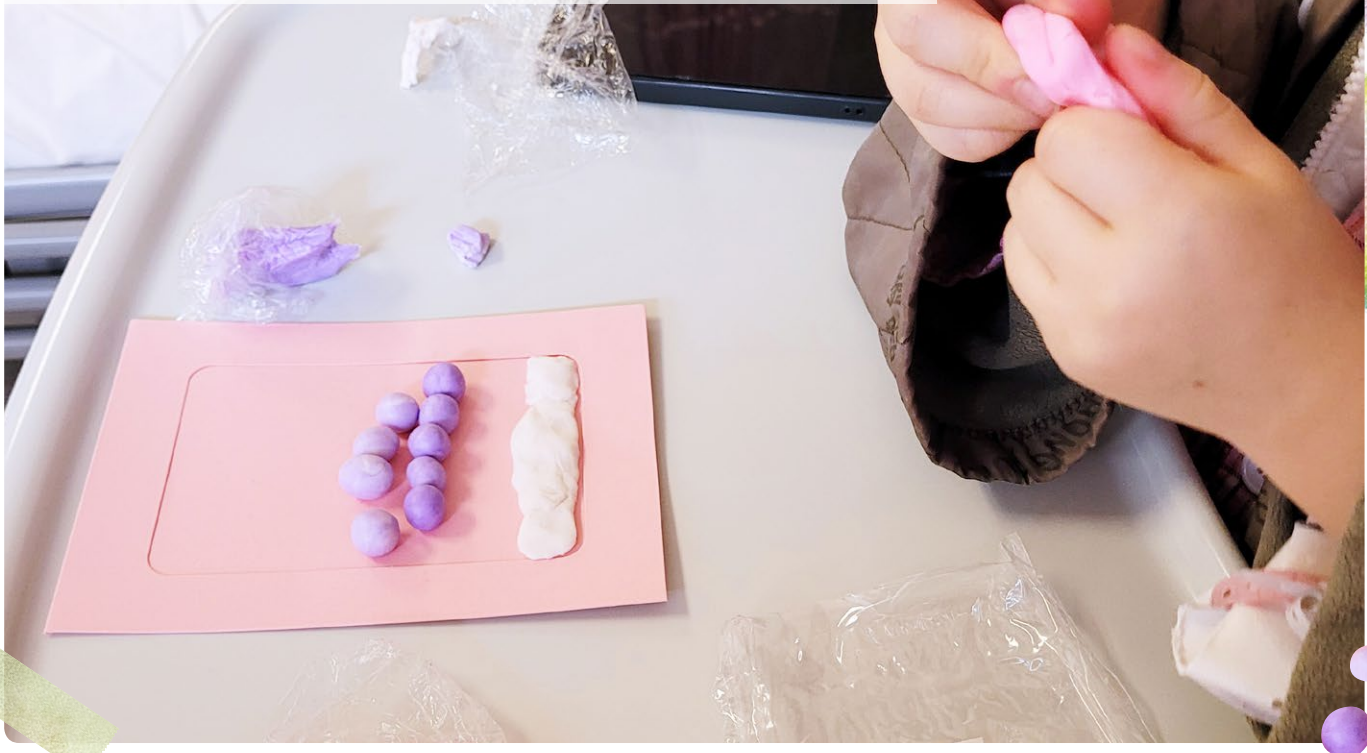
The success of the first activity confirmed the accurate assessment of the hospital play specialists, prompting them to prepare a colourful pom-pom craft activity. Despite her stomachache and discomfort, Loklok immersed herself in designing and making a bouquet. Her mood gradually brightened, and she enthusiastically talked about her parents' visits amid their busy schedules and her conversations with her brother. Loklok expressed that having family is the greatest support and comfort in her life.

Loklok's pom-pom bouquet, created with positive emotions, was full of life, and she proudly showed it to the hospital play specialists. Her face also beamed with confidence and satisfaction. Understanding that Loklok had persevered in the craft activity despite the pain and discomfort, using her willpower to combat suffering, the hospital play specialists were proud of the child's strength and courage. Hence, they gave Loklok a transparent water bottle as the vase, encouraging her to continue expressing herself and finding inner strength through craft activities.



Familiar Play, Invisible Power

Over a month later, Loklok was hospitalized again due to stomachache. As it was near Christmas, the hospital play specialists arranged various kinds of play for her in different days, namely making angel crafts, clay Christmas trees, and scratch cards. When Loklok focused on colouring the angels with paint, she made each stroke meticulously and creatively. She even enthusiastically shared colouring techniques with other paediatric patients, and chatted with them, seemingly forgetting her stomachache!



Clay play is a common tactile play activity. The sensory stimulation during colour matching, kneading, mixing, and shaping allows the brain to focus on the present moment, relieving anxiety and stress. At the same time, the creative process requires to concentrate, whilst allowing to temporarily relax and escape from negative emotions. Loklok was focused while playing with clay, and the severity of her stomachache decreased from level 8 to level 4. When she completed her colourful clay Christmas tree, she felt incredibly satisfied. Her self-worth was also enhanced substantially.





Scratch cards were another craft thoughtfully prepared for Loklok by the hospital play specialists. By simply scratching off the coating on the surface of the black card, one can create an artwork. The techniques are similar to colouring, yet the resultant image appears subtly, encouraging curiosity and anticipation. Loklok's final masterpiece consisted of reindeers, a Christmas tree, birds, and snowflakes — it was beautiful. When the “Merry X'Mas” words appeared when the coating was scratched off, Loklok smiled and her face beamed with joy as if she had managed to offer a blessing to the world.



Later, Loklok continued facing follow-up medical consultations and actively shared her situations with the hospital play specialists. Although her physical condition fluctuated, she became more energetic than before, showed a more positive and proactive attitude towards her illness, and even expressed a desire to engage in creative art again! The hospital play specialists then invited Loklok and her family to participate in a workshop. Loklok accepted and was fully engaged. The moment she finished her artwork, she was very satisfied and showed her pride in her personal efforts. This activity not only allowed Loklok to enjoy the fun of creation but also strengthened the bond between her and her family.



Although arts and crafts may seem simple, when used properly, it can bridge the gap between people, build a sense of competence, and change perspectives. It also helps create a positive experience whilst fighting illnesses and facilitate the recovery and growth of paediatric patients.

Integrating Electronic Technology Hospital Play Services Evolve with the Times



With the rapid advances in technology, all professions must keep up with the times and keep improving. In the medical field, the use of technology can make treatment plans more effective, and hospital play services have also adjusted and upgraded with the development of technology.

Electronic Games - Motivation to Face Treatments



Hospital play specialist accompanying paediatric patients during electronic games.

The audio-visual stimulation and leveling-up design of electronic games are sure to delight children, including paediatric patients. For many years, electronic games have been included in hospital play services to enable paediatric patients to be distracted from discomfort caused by treatment, facilitate interaction and build friendships among patients, even create opportunities for ice breaking between healthcare professionals and patients, making a more harmonious relationship.

Depending on the individual physical condition of each paediatric patient, hospital play specialists will set the time and types of electronic games that paediatric patients can play. For example, for some children with epilepsy, games with excessive flashing lights and overly stimulating elements should be avoided, and the time spent playing also needs to be adjusted. These limited but valuable electronic games have also become a driving force and encouragement for patients to face treatments as they look forward to fully enjoy playing games after completing treatments.

Dynamic Electronic Games - an Incentive for Exercises

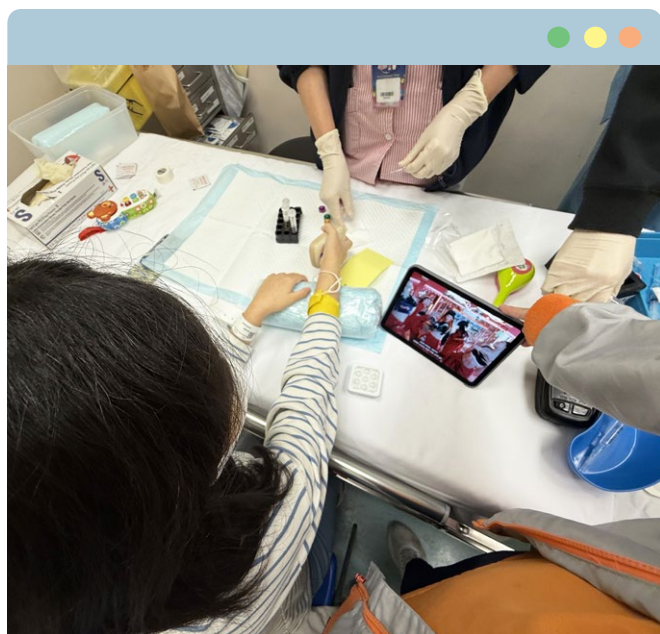
By using controllers and accessories, paediatric patients can overcome environmental limitations and play electronic games simulating sports such as running, ball games, or dancing. To cater for the needs to move their limbs for post-surgery or bedridden paediatric patients, hospital play specialists collaborate with healthcare professionals to encourage paediatric patients to engage in motion-enhancing (electronic) games so that they can exercise sitting up, kicking their legs, or reaching out their arms. This makes the repetitive treatments more fun and aids in physical recovery.

Portable Devices Enabling More Flexible Services

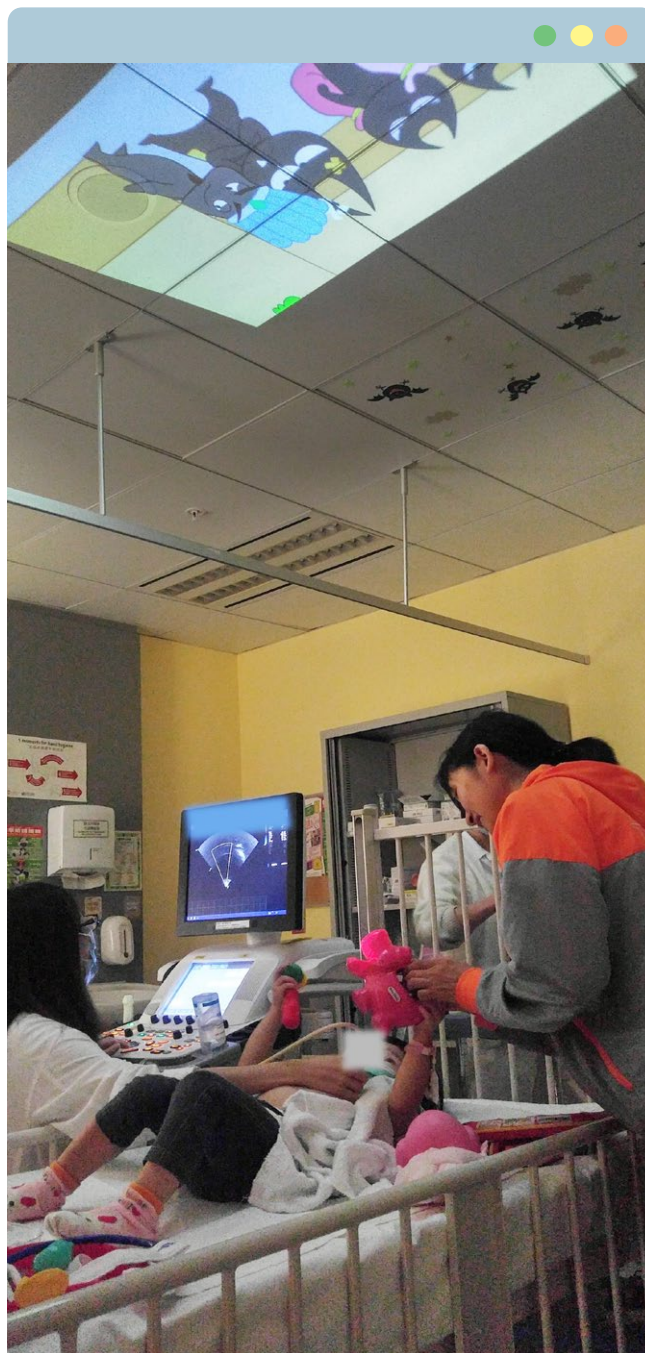
As electronic products become increasingly portable and widespread, their use in hospital play services is also on the rise. Child life specialists* in Western countries are now equipped with tablets when they work. In addition to built-in games for distraction play, the tablets are also installed with music for breathing and relaxation exercises and short simulation videos of medical procedures, making the tablets a highly efficient toolbox for providing hospital play.

Having gained experience through overseas study tours, Playright hospital play specialists are determined to enhance their services and have started to examine the overall package of electronic services. In addition to equipping themselves with tablets, they have digitized paper tools and physical services, collaborated with healthcare professionals to shoot short videos of medical procedures, applied related tools in treatment rooms, and created localized music suitable for paediatric patients in Hong Kong.

*"Child life specialists" is the North American and Australian term for hospital play specialists



With a tablet provided as a tool for distraction play by the hospital play specialist, a paediatric patient watches videos while calmly receiving an intravenous injection.



The echocardiogram examination room has been equipped with a fixed device that projects images onto the ceiling, allowing paediatric patient to lie down and enjoy a video with sound and picture during the examination. This frees up the hospital play specialist to comfort the children, while healthcare professionals can focus on implementing the examination procedures.



Thinking Out of the Box

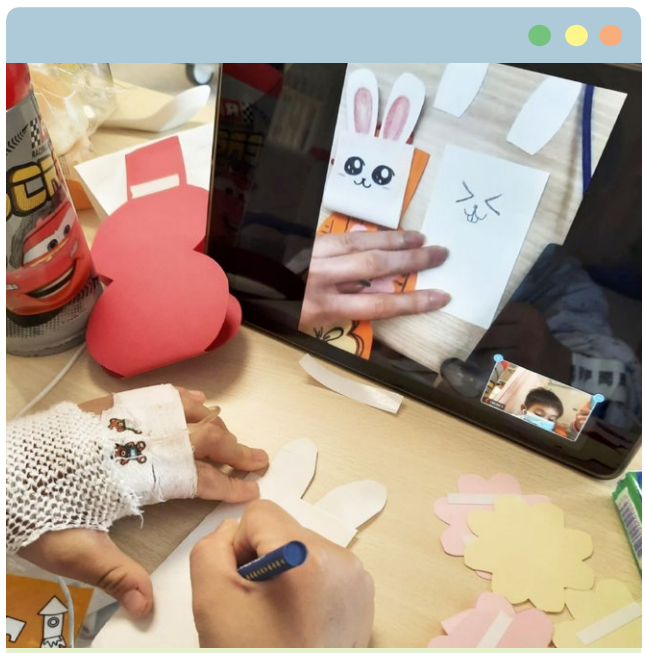


Long-time hospitalized children connect with hospital play specialists and participate in hospital play online.

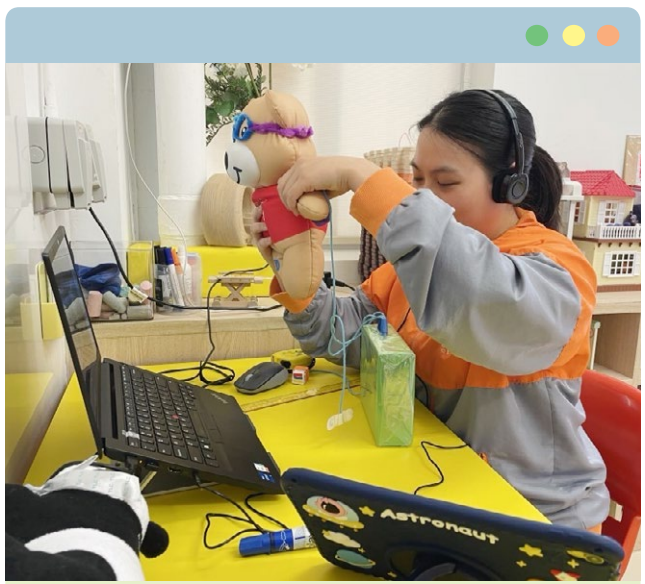
The strict implementation of epidemic control measures during the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the development of electronic remote services for hospital play, subsequently benefiting more paediatric patients, regardless if hospitalized for a long time or scheduled for checkups.

Long-time hospitalized children have limited contact with the outside world, let alone social interaction. Hence, video interactive sessions enabled by electronic technology allow patients, despite their physical limitations, to connect with hospital play specialists and participate in hospital play and even have the opportunity to communicate with children outside the hospital.

In response to the needs of paediatric patients scheduled for checkups, hospital play specialists will arrange video play in advance, allowing children and their parents to easily and conveniently interact with the hospital play specialist at home. Through videos of preparation play, children can understand more about upcoming medical procedures and have adequate time to prepare themselves mentally. For older children, this can be more efficient than the preparation provided just before the checkup.



During hospitalization, paediatric patients participate online in hospital play in real-time.



The hospital play specialist provides online preparation play to paediatric patients to help them understand medical procedures and facilitate the subsequent examination.



Virtual Reality for Comprehensive Patient Preparation

As electronic games have evolved from two-dimensional to virtual reality, hospital play specialists have also kept pace with this change. At the invitation of Dr Vansie Kwok, Consultant of the Anaesthesiology & Perioperative Medicine Department of the Hong Kong Children’s Hospital, we participated in a study on the effectiveness of applying virtual reality to help paediatric patients reduce perioperative anxiety. The study was jointly conducted by the Hong Kong Children’s Hospital, the Department of Computing of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and the Department of Computer Science of the City University of Hong Kong. Our role was to design child-friendly content for the virtual reality.

Target	Paediatric patients scheduled for elective surgeries	Venue	Hong Kong Children’s Hospital
Objective	Reduce children’s perioperative anxiety	Tools	Virtual reality headset
Workflow	Wearing a virtual reality headset, the paediatric patient immerses in a realistic 360-degree view of the operating theatre, rehearsing the surgical preparation process.		
Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voice navigation by healthcare professionals and hospital play specialists • Allow the paediatric patient to explore the environment of the operating theatre, including operating bed, operating lights, etc. • Allow the paediatric patient to experience surgical procedures, including choosing scent on the anaesthetic face mask and practicing deep breathing through a balloon-blowing game • During the process, hospital play specialists ask the paediatric patient questions to assess the child’s understanding and their emotions. 		

Since the virtual reality experience is designed for children, the entire experience is presented from a child’s perspective. Hospital play specialists participated in the design of the storyline, utilizing their practical experience in hospital wards and their understanding of paediatric patients to highlight the areas and aspects of children’s concern.

In the storyline, a panda accompanies a paediatric patient to engage in a task of “finding sleeping bubbles”. The voice navigation follows a language style that children can understand, avoiding any difficult medical terms to maintain a child-friendly experience, reduce fear, and eliminate misunderstandings.

Although the virtual reality experience is presented through storytelling, it still meticulously covers all the pre-operative preparations, explaining everything to the children. The story covers healthcare professionals in the operating theatre and the medical apparatus paediatric patients will see when awake. They can even choose the colour of surgical gowns and the scent of the anaesthetic face mask, making the process fun and engaging while helping them understand the surgical preparation process and preparing them both cognitively and psychologically.

After completing the virtual reality experience, paediatric patients can try on real anesthesia face masks. Hospital play specialists will follow-up children’s questions, and healthcare professionals will respond accordingly. The paediatric patients who have participated have unanimously expressed that the entire process was not only playful, but the immersive experience was also very memorable, like completing a pre-operative rehearsal in the real world, which also helped them eliminate anxiety and tension.

This groundbreaking collaboration between the hospital, the universities and the hospital play specialists has integrated electronic technology into the care of paediatric patients, upholding the principle of child-centered care and reducing children’s anxiety before surgeries. Multiple goals have been achieved! The hospital also stated that the application of virtual reality will continue to be provided to benefit more paediatric patients.



Virtual reality is used to guide paediatric patients to understand surgical preparation, the operating theatre, and the healthcare professionals, helping them get prepared in a playful way.



The healthcare professionals team and hospital play specialists collaborate to design details from a child’s perspective, creating the child-friendly, immersive perioperative preparation.



A paediatric patient, their parent, and hospital play specialists experience the virtual reality together; questions can be asked at any time.

Our Heartfelt Gratitude



- ♥ The Community Chest of Hong Kong generously donated to support the provision of hospital play services in the Department of Paediatrics & Adolescent Medicine of the Princess Margaret Hospital in 2025/26.
- ♥ Social Innovation Fund of the Community Chest of Hong Kong generously donated to support the 3-year project “Cradle Harbour: Ensuring Infant’s Smooth Transitions from Hospital to Children’s Residential Home” in the Caritas Medical Centre from January 2025 to December 2027.
- ♥ Thank you to philanthropists Mr and Mrs Lawrence Ho who generously donated to support our 3-year “Flourish Forward: Transforming & Expanding Hospital Play Service” project. The project has brought benefits to develop Hospital Play Service.
- ♥ Lee Hysan Foundation and Ng Teng Fong Charitable Foundation generously donated to support the project “Magic Scans: Empowering Paediatric Patients through Therapeutic Play” in the Department of Radiology of the Hong Kong Children’s Hospital from October 2024 to September 2027.
- ♥ Kerry Group Kuok Foundation generously donated to support the 3-year project “Project Sunshine: Let Children in DDU Be Seen, Be Valued” in the Caritas Medical Centre from April 2025 to March 2028.
- ♥ Thank you to Rusy and Purviz Shroff Charitable Foundation who generously donated to support hospital play services for Nephrology patients for 1 year.
- ♥ The project of “Healing Journey: Hospital Play helps children’s health and wellbeing in medical setting” from November 2024 to October 2026 which has benefited paediatric patients from the Department of Paediatrics and Adolescent Medicine of the Prince of Wales Hospital, has been supported by:
 - ♥ Wild Organic Company Limited
 - ♥ Toys Hola Limited
 - ♥ Arts Plus
 - ♥ China Base Holdings Limited
 - ♥ With the matching grant from the Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged
- ♥ The project of “Play for Wellbeing – Hospital Play Service” from September 2023 to August 2025 which has benefited paediatric patients from the Department of Paediatrics and Adolescent Medicine of the Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern Hospital, has been supported by:
 - ♥ Lichi Charitable Foundation Limited
 - ♥ With the matching grant from the Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged
- ♥ The Aberdeen Marina Club generously donated to support the provision of hospital play services from October 2025 to April 2026.
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