

## GLACLP Article Review: "Playing to reduce anxiety levels and negative emotions in hospitalized children."

Article Review by Elise Huntley

Child life specialists are healthcare providers that use play based interventions to support positive coping during a child's hospital experience. Child life specialists know the power that play has in supporting children's development and their coping with stressful situations. Play is offered to patients through medical play sessions and other therapeutic interventions, including providing playrooms for patients and their siblings to visit and explore. While practitioners know the impact that play can make in a child's life, there is also research to support play as an important part of reducing anxiety and negative emotions.

Hospitalization is a stressful and threatening experience for children. Whether it is the child's first visit to the hospital or fifty-first visit, the hospital can still create feelings of anxiety and other negative emotions. Play is an essential part of children's growth and development, especially for those children that spend time at the hospital. This study looked at whether play was effective in reducing the psychological burden of hospitalization. The goal of the researchers was to "test the effectiveness of hospital play interventions in minimizing the anxiety levels and negative emotions of hospitalized Hong Kong Chinese children" (Lit et al, 2016, p.2).

"Play interventions to reduce anxiety and negative emotions in hospitalized children" by Li, Chung, Ho & Kwok (2016) used a quasi-experimental study to explore the relationship between therapeutic interventions, hospitalized children's anxiety levels and their negative emotions. There were 304 participants, 154 in the intervention group at one hospital and 150 received standard care at another hospital. Research participants were children between the ages of 3 and 12 years old that were staying at the hospital for 3 consecutive days. Children with cognitive and learning difficulties were excluded to control for variables among participants. The experimental group received a 30 minute play intervention with a hospital play specialist each day that they were inpatient. These sessions were mostly in the playroom unless the patient's health required a bedside session instead. The results were that the intervention group exhibited less negative emotional behavior. They also experienced significantly lower levels of anxiety than those children who receive standard care.

The participants in this study reported that the therapeutic interventions "helped them know more about medical procedures" (Li et al, 2016, p.6). Anxiety impedes a child's coping with the medical environment and this research supports ways to decrease the child's anxiety levels. The results of this study support the need for play interventions for children in the hospital. Medical play and playrooms are both important interventions that worked together to decrease the anxiety and negative emotions of hospitalized children in this study. The research can be used to support the work that child life specialists do in the hospital and the importance of play for hospitalized children.

Li, W. H., Chung, J. O., Ho, K. Y., & Kwok, B. M. (2016). Play interventions to reduce anxiety and negative emotions in hospitalized children. *BMC Pediatrics*, 16(1), 36.