

27 August 2009

Dr. York Chow, GBS, JP,  
Secretary for Food and Health  
Food and Health Bureau  
19th floor, Murray Building,  
Garden Road  
Central, Hong Kong

BY POST AND BY FAX

Dear *Dr. Chow*,

**"Giving children in hospital clear benefits and due rights: recommendations for play provision in Hong Kong's Centre of Excellence in Paediatrics"**

We are most grateful for the opportunity to share our views on the coming Centre of Excellence in Paediatrics, which has so much potential for the betterment of the children's lives in Hong Kong.

As a not-for-profit organisation promoting the child's right to play, Playright Children's Play Association ("Playright") has a clear vision – to enrich the quality life of every child through quality play. The comments attached, which have been endorsed by Playright's highly experienced Executive Council, are particularly relevant to the implementation of such a vision in your new Centre. They have been distilled from the views of a large group of Playright staff and volunteers and are keyed directly to the development of this Centre as a place of providing high-standard and comprehensive holistic medical care to the children.

They are merely an outline of our views, and I and my expert teams would very much appreciate the opportunity of meeting with staff of your bureau for an in-depth review and discussion.

Thank you for your kind consideration.

Yours sincerely



Chow Chun-bong  
Chairperson



Kathy Kin-ho Wong  
Executive Director

Encl.

cc. Ms. Sandra Lee, JP, Permanent Secretary for Food & Health (Health)

**Playright Children's Play Association 智樂兒童遊樂協會**

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# **Giving children in hospital clear benefits and due rights**

## **Recommendations for play provision in Hong Kong's Centre of Excellence in Paediatrics**

*A submission by  
Playright Children's Play Association  
August 2009*

### **A The ethos of play**

#### **Play is essential**

It is universally recognized that regular and sustained play of all kinds is an essential factor in the all round growth and development of each child. An ever widening range of academic and action research locally and overseas testifies to the positive effects of many different forms of play and it also draws attention to the negative effects of play deprivation.

#### **Play remains essential in hospitals**

In a familiar and secure environment, play comes naturally to a well developed, healthy child—although support from parents and other caregivers certainly remains important. By contrast, in the alien and sometimes threatening environment of a hospital, children can often lose their natural inclination for play and so may require professional help to encourage them to enter the redeeming world of play once more.

The already alarming situation in which the child alone and away from family in hospital finds herself is of course often rendered even more critical by the pressures of illness and treatment. Fortunately, it has been shown worldwide that play offers a valuable channel through which generalized and specific fears and anxieties relating to hospitalization can be expressed and indeed reduced.

In the first place, when play is properly organized and encouraged for children in hospital a measure of normality comes back into their daily life. The uplifting effects of play can help lessen the developmental regression that children may otherwise experience during their stay in hospital. Next, many treatment procedures that can seem relatively routine to an adult can be terrifying for children. Therapeutic play intervention is thus invaluable in calming fears and setting the stage for the best medical outcome and for a speedier recovery.

In addition, many empirical studies have proved that, where children need to undergo surgery, preoperative play, including visits with hospital play professionals to an operating theatre and play with dolls and specially designed mannequins to introduce anaesthesia and other



procedures, is more effective in minimizing children's negative emotional responses to surgery than preparation by means of information alone.

### **Play has a firm hold in overseas hospitals**

Hospital play services first emerged in the United Kingdom and the United States as early as the 1950s, and have since grown dramatically in scope and value, as the following selected examples show.

Generally acknowledged as the leading children's hospital in Britain, London's Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children deploys a team of 38 qualified hospital play specialists and two assistants who provide a range of creative and expressive therapeutic activities for children and young people in the hospital's dedicated play department. This department also supports the training of hospital play students by providing placements. Each ward of the hospital has its own playroom, as do the out-patient and X-ray departments. As well as indoor and outdoor play areas for children there is a specially designed activity centre for adolescents, while a multi-sensory room in the activity centre serves children with special needs.

An important milestone was the starting of the first hospital play group by the Save the Children Fund in 1963 at the Brook Hospital, also in London. Fast forwarding to 1985, the National Association of Hospital Play Staff set up the Hospital Play Staff Examination Trust (HPSET) to institute a national qualification for the profession. By 1992, the Hospital Play Staff Examination Board had been recognized as an awarding body and 1996 saw the first graduates of the course.

In the USA, a child life programme was set up at Cleveland City Hospital in 1955. In 1965, the Association for the Well-Being of Hospitalized Children and Their Families (renamed the Association for the Care of Children in Hospitals or ACCH in 1967). ACCH members included doctors, nurses, child life specialists, parents and other health professionals working with children and families. Between the 1970s and 1980s, the child life movement experienced rapid growth and many new programmes were started. In 1982, the Child Life Council was formed. In 1974, a Child Life/Activity Specialist Committee was formed within ACCH and became a study section in 1975 to help the child life profession achieve a separate identity within ACCH to continue developing its own professional practices and policies. During the 1970s, colleges developed academic programmes incorporating hospital internships to prepare students to work with the hospitalized child. By 1998, a standardized Child Life Professional Certification Examination was in place.

Nowadays, many other countries, including Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, and the Philippines provide a professional hospital play service in selected hospitals.

### **Playright's pioneering role in Hong Kong**

Playright, a leading Hong Kong NGO that champions the welfare of children, pioneered hospital play for Hong Kong in 1994. This now forms an important plank in its wide ranging service and other activities in Hong Kong, and receives highly favourable comment from the public and health professionals alike. Since 1994, more than 200,000 children have benefited from our unique services. We are currently working at Princess Margaret Hospital (PMH) and Caritas Medical Centre (CMC). Apart from providing direct play services to children at PMH and CMC, we also run play training workshops for paediatric staff and volunteers on how to use play in their daily work with children. Additionally, we offer our experience and support in setting up child-friendly wards and hospital treatment rooms and a much acclaimed interactive television service that reaches out to all children in these two facilities, including those in isolation wards.

All our hospital play specialists hold professional qualifications and remain abreast of current developments. Such validation, and our practice of continuous improvement, offers children, parents and attending medical professionals further assurance, if any were needed, of the quality and depth of our work and the positive values we add to the integrated health care team in caring for the hundreds of children we see each year.

The main task of hospital play specialists is to design and introduce appropriate play activities to children with acute and chronic illness, in order to prevent potential psychological stress, provide enjoyment and lessen fear. They are trained to understand the special psychosocial needs of children with a wide range of diseases and problems, including cancer, kidney, blood and orthopaedic disorders.

### **Playright's partnerships**

Playright has long partnered different hospitals and the Hospital Authority and we have been considerably heartened by the broad endorsement our play services have received in Hong Kong's public hospitals since the 1990s. In other initiatives, we have been invited to advise on the setting up of the Children's Charter in Hospitals, prepare play service information for the Infectious Disease Centre located at PMH, and also been invited as an advisor to contribute to the HA in its recent report on the development of a children hospital for Hong Kong. We also gave hospital play trainings to paediatric nurses in different hospitals as well as the following organizations: The Institute of Advanced Nursing Studies (Hospital Authority); The Chinese University of Hong Kong's Faculty of Medicine and The Nethersole School of Nursing; Association of Hong Kong Nursing Staff; Union Hospital and Kiang Wu Nursing College of Macau.



## **B Playright's Recommended Policy**

Besides deploying its extensive experience to develop and provide play environment and services in hospital settings in Hong Kong, Playright has also visited various children's hospitals, including facilities in Japan, the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States and Canada. Our professional staff teams and committee members share the same broad vision as their people and we draw confidently on this experience, as well as on our local experience, in making the following recommendations in respect of the setting up of a paediatric centre of excellence in Hong Kong.

- 1. The paediatric centre of excellence ("the Centre") should include in its hospital and ward policies clear and actionable statements relating to play provision for children in hospital.***
- 2. The Centre should employ appropriately qualified hospital play staff to plan and provide play activities for hospitalized children with a range of different needs as well as making play provision available in outpatient departments.***
- 3. The Centre should provide adequate resources to secure a child-friendly play environment and service provision for children and should ensure that children have safe and protected access to indoor and outdoor play environments within the Centre.***
- 4. The Centre should have the necessary play facilities and equipment in its wards and these should be so designed as to be adaptable to a wide range of ages and needs.***

## **C Recommendations on policy for the new Children's Hospital**

### **Statement One**

***The Centre should include in its hospital and ward policies clear and actionable statements relating to play provision for children in hospital.***

- (a) The Centre's play policy should be formulated according to proven philosophies of play and child psychology which give due prominence to the value of hospital play in meeting the developmental and therapeutic needs of children of all ages and abilities, as well as giving practical substance to the children's right to opportunities for play and recreation.
- (b) This policy should recognize that a play service department should be set up in the hospital to provide therapeutic play services to support all children without exception who are having

to cope with stress and anxiety due to their medical condition and hospitalization. Such services, in the hands of hospital play specialists, will be designed to help children become more relaxed and cooperative in the face of upcoming medical procedures; experience less anxiety and using better coping strategies during medical procedures; better release their stress and anger through play; and also maintain and/or promote their normal psychosocial development through play.

- (c) This policy should also recognize the need for hospital play specialists to work as a team with other health care professionals in providing holistic and integrated health care to the children in the Centre.
- (d) This policy should identify and uphold the need for play services in all departments, including the Out-patient Department (OPD), A & E Department (if any), and the X-ray Department (if any) so that the play service provided in the Centre can more comprehensively and seamlessly meet the developmental and psychosocial needs of the children it serves.

#### **Statement Two**

***The Centre should employ appropriately qualified hospital play staff to plan and provide play activities for hospitalized children with a range of different needs as well as making play provision available in outpatient departments.***

- (a) The Centre should recognize trained hospital play specialists as the persons solely responsible for the provision of play for children in the Centre, and they should not be asked or required to fulfil multiple roles or take up other responsibilities. They should be primarily charged with planning, evaluating and providing hospital play services.
- (b) The Centre should ensure that such specialists at various ranks meet agreed training, qualification and experience criteria. It should also ensure that they are further qualified and supported with on-the-job training, supervision and regular performance monitoring.
- (c) The Centre should be organized such that its Play Service Department and the hospital play specialists are recognized within the structure of the hospital system.
- (d) The Centre should commit to becoming Hong Kong's centre for the training of new hospital play specialists in the near future.

#### **Statement Three**

***The Centre should provide adequate resources to secure a child-friendly play environment and service provision for children and should ensure that children have safe and protected access to indoor and outdoor play environments within the Centre.***

- (a) Sufficient resources should be allocated in the overall planning stage, such that the decision-making process for the play environment design critically involves all those affected and invokes a team approach. The core design and planning team should include



design professionals with relevant experience, health care professionals, hospital play specialists, parents and children. Working together, they can best devise interior and exterior play environments suitable for children and adolescents.

- (b) The Centre should secure the child-friendliness of the play facilities and design by also planning from the child's perspective and with the needs of the family in mind. A hospital environment can be a threatening one; it is crucial that the facilities in general should be so designed as to welcome and energize children and their parents.
- (c) The Centre should secure an annual budget available for the on-going consumable materials and toys for play programmes and services provided by hospital play specialists.

#### **Statement Four**

***The Centre should have the necessary play facilities and equipment in its wards and these should be so designed as to be adaptable to a wide range of ages and needs.***

- (a) The Centre should recognize as a matter of policy that a playroom should be set up on at least each floor of its wards and that a toy library on a suitable scale should be provided. If possible, playrooms should also be provided in different departments.
- (b) The Centre should provide a variety of play materials and spaces to meet the needs of all children using the facility, regardless of age, physical condition, or developmental level. Layout and design should ensure accessibility for all, including children and teens with physical, mental and sensory disabilities, together with their families. Other than indoor play areas, permanent provision of quality outdoor play spaces within the Centre will be needed. All these play areas should be provided with access ways for beds, wheelchairs and other mobility aids.
- (c) The Centre should ensure that play spaces and facilities are designed to help and encourage parents to share in the care and treatment of their children while in the Centre. Such involvement in the child health care experience is vital to the child's recovery and well being.
- (d) The Centre should seek to meet the social needs of children in hospital with low mobility or in isolation wards by setting up facilities and related equipment for live interactive television programmes.

#### **D Playright stands ready to engage in the setting up of the Centre**

**A good start will make all the difference and it will be extremely important to bear children firmly in mind and indeed involve them from initial planning to final commissioning and operation. Playright has precisely the range and depth of experience needed to ensure this is the case.**

Playright cares about all children and has a well demonstrated special concern for children in hospital. We are fully aware of the importance of designing a child-friendly environment, setting up of play facilities and operating a play service at a hospital for children. We are well prepared to support the various stages of the development of the Centre, including the planning, setting up, management and operation of the environments and services.

Our long history in developing play as part of paediatric services in Hong Kong should be a real asset to the Centre, as the following varied references make clear:

**(a) Specialist providers of a Hospital Play Service since 1994**

- Our teams of trained hospital play specialists run the play services at Princess Margaret Hospital and Caritas Medical Centre. The service was also provided in Queen Mary Hospital in 1994-1998 and 2000-2002, in Queen Elizabeth Hospital in 1994-1998 and in Kwong Wah Hospital 1995-2001, but was forced to close down due to funding limitations.
- We have rich experience in setting up a stimulating play room with appropriate toys and child-friendly treatment rooms with toys that can entertain and distract.
- We give orientation and psychological preparation to children on admission and medical procedures through preparation play activities and orientation packages. We also provide distraction play, medical play, developmental play and other therapeutic play activities to support children's psychosocial needs while in hospital. Our work shows how important it is to understand and acknowledge that effective hospital play services are people centred, not merely functions of suitable settings, however good these may be.
- So that parents and hospital staff can better understand the psychosocial and play needs of the children, we also run play workshops to equip them with properly targeted play skills
- To gain support from the community, we provide training and lead a team of committed volunteers in supporting the provision of developmental play services to children for maintaining and promoting their developmental growth at the hospitals.

**(b) Rich experience in delivering out-of-the-ordinary practices**

- To give more play opportunities to children in hospital, especially where they have a long term illness, we provide outings and play days for them to enjoy playing together with their families.
- Currently, our Playright Channel project in Princess Margaret Hospital and Caritas Medical Centre since 2006 provides an interactive telecast play programme uniting the children in both hospitals, whether or not they are mobile and well enough to take part by coming along to our dedicated studio.



**(c) Setting up of child-friendly environments in hospitals**

- We have worked closely with hospitals to design and construct child-friendly play spaces at paediatric and adolescent wards at Caritas Medical Centre in 2002, Princess Margaret Hospital in 2003, and now the parents' room in the Developmental Disability Unit of Caritas Medical Centre.
- We have helped to set up child-friendly treatment rooms with distraction play toys at Princess Margaret Hospital, Queen Mary Hospital, Kwong Wah Hospital, Queen Elizabeth Hospital from 2003 to the present.
- We have also been involved in setting up the play room, developing toy library and drawing wall murals for various hospitals since 1990s, including Queen Mary Hospital, Tseung Kwan O Hospital, Princess Margaret Hospital, Kwong Wah Hospital, Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Caritas Medical Centre and Our Lady of Maryknoll Hospital

**(d) Initiating and providing professional training and research related to play**

- Playright has initiated and cooperated with SPACE, the University of Hong Kong, in training local hospital play specialists since 1995. We are planning to train up more local hospital play specialists in the near future, and this rich and unique experience bodes well for planning similar training for and at the Centre. Since 1995, we have held five courses with SPACE, and we are planning to hold another one in 2009.
- We have been increasingly involved in research studies and surveys concerning the development of hospital play since 1994. This experience will help further strengthen evidence based support for the service.

**E The way forward**

- Including a professionally run hospital play service will help give the Centre a leading edge Asia-wide as a provider of high standard and comprehensive holistic medical care to the children under its care.
- We are looking forward to meeting with the Bureau to further explain our vision and ideas on play provision for the projected Centre of Excellence in Paediatrics.