



Spreading the cheer

WHY CHILDREN NEED CHILD LIFE SERVICES

When a child is diagnosed with cancer, the whole family is affected. But the child may be too young to understand the medical condition and the kind of treatment that will be administered in phases. Most of the months when the child is confined indoors within a sterile environment for treatment, it is the most trying time for the child as well as the parents.

Child life specialists like Charlotte Roseline are trained in Child Life Services and help parents of these children in handling the stress and coping with the condition of their child. The little patients are engaged in creative play where they are encouraged to discuss the treatments and procedures they receive, and express their feelings.

"Since 2007 Manipal Hospitals is associated with The

Priyanka Foundation to help integrate Child Life Services. Child Life Practitioners are trained professional with expertise in helping children and their family coping with the life's most challenging ordeals," inform Charlotte, and Diya Ballal, a volunteer at the department. "People often ask us if it's tough being in this profession and having to deal with so many unwell children on a daily basis. However, it is not our sympathy that they need; it is the understanding to make them feel at ease. This is exactly what child life therapy helps us offer them this understanding through a variety of methods. Most children are terrified of hospitals and it's our job to transform this fear of needles and white linen into an exciting environment where they can be still be children and have all the fun while their treatment regiment is on," they say.



■ Launching the 'I CAN SIR' Child Life Service at the Children's Day event are (L to R) Diya, Dr Poonam Patil, Dr H Sudarshan Ballal, Lara Dutta, Pramod, Charlotte

PLAY SESSIONS HELP CHILDREN WITH CANCER BY:

- Reducing anxiety and stress
- Providing a space to express their feelings
- Reducing pain and discomfort
- Improving mood
- Providing positive environmental stimulation and comfort

Manipal Hospitals and The Priyanka Foundation's integrated Child Life Service works at cheering up children with cancer through play, and reducing their trauma

It is not always that we take precious time from our hectic lifestyle to bring the smiles on a child's face. Recently at an event in a major hotel in the city, children with cancer were treated to some fun and entertainment, bringing the smiles on their face. For a while, these children left their haunting disease behind and participated in the revelry arranged just for them with their childlike enthusiasm.

Manipal Hospitals, The Priyanka Foundation and its Child Life Service, and Lara Dutta, former Miss Universe and popular film star, paid an ode to children to whom happiness is probably the best gift.

At the event, a special forum 'I Can Sir' was launched to help affected families of children suffering from cancer come together to share experiences, sort out issues and bond together.

ROLE OF THE CHILD LIFE SERVICE UNIT

Manipal Hospitals and The Priyanka Foundation has integrated Child Life Service to dilute the trauma of a child between 2 and 10 years undergoing the treatment of cancer. The Child Life Service includes services in the form of a Child Life Practitioner who takes them through

SPREADING SMILES AMONG CHILDREN WITH CANCER



■ Lara distributes plants to kids symbolising hope



■ Child Life Specialist Charlotte Rosline (R) and Child Life Service volunteer Diya Ballal (Centre) welcome Lara Dutta to the Children's Day celebrations



■ A child is engrossed in drawing

these painful treatment procedures by being a playmate throughout their treatment cycle. It also includes bedside play time, therapeutic sessions during the procedure and after, grief counseling, preparing family and sibling support along with sketching of the family portrait.

Dr. Sudarshan



Ballal - Medical Director & Chairman - Medical Advisory Board, Manipal Health Enterprises, says, "It is our responsibility to ensure that we look into all the aspects of a child suffering from cancer. Children are closer to God and we must invest our truest and best efforts to treat them and keep the spirit of hope alive."

Former Miss Universe and actress Lara Dutta was filled with emotion and said, "I am proud to be associated with a noble cause driven by Manipal Hospitals and The Priyanka Foundation. It is the spirit of life that needs to be cherished and be proud of, as exhibited by these children. I am touched and overwhelmed by these children who develop a fighting spirit at such a young age."

The beauty queen spent time interacting and playing with around 30 children gathered for the event, spreading smiles and instilling happiness. Several fun games were organized on various carnival themes to gift them a day where elaborate painful treatments didn't stop them from smiling in happiness.

Child Life Services by Manipal Hospitals & The Priyanka Foundation can be reached on +91 9686413670

'CHILDHOOD CANCERS RESPOND BETTER TO TREATMENT AND HAVE HIGH CURE RATES'

Dr Poonam Patil, medical oncologist, Manipal Hospitals, explains to Leena Mudbidri how childhood cancer can be treated effectively and parents can help cope with their child's condition

■ How should parents of children with cancer be educated about the treatment for cancer?

Cancer is relatively rare in children, however considerable improvements in treatments mean that for every ten children diagnosed with cancer, almost eight (78%) will survive for five years or more, compared with just three in ten (28%) in the late 1960s.

This improvement in survival rates is due to significant advances in treatment, resulting in cure or long-term remission for a substantial proportion of children with cancer. Childhood cancer treatment is a success story of modern medicine in which effective treatments

have been identified for previously presumably untreatable diseases.

Any time a child is diagnosed with cancer, it affects every family member and nearly every aspect of the family's life. Parents of children diagnosed with cancer would definitely be anxious considering the nature of illness. However, they should go ahead for the treatment with a positive attitude. Their attitude also affects the child who is very sensitive to the emotions of parents.

■ What are the precautions parents should take during the treatment process?

During the treatment, parents should carefully follow the doctor's prescription and bring the child to the hospital on schedule. It may involve the parents seeking leave from their office work to do so. The chemotherapy for children reduces their immunity, making them susceptible to various infections. As children may not understand the importance of hygiene, it is for the caretakers

to see that they wash hands regularly, provide clean, cooked food and sterile water to the children undergoing chemotherapy. Also, as children will not be able to express their problems, it is for the parents or caretakers to be sensitive and alert to any changes that they see in the child's routine activity.

■ How do events like the one held by Manipal Hospital help alleviate the mental pain of parents and give them hope?

Yes, it was a time, where all barriers and inhibition of being a patient or patient's parents were forgotten for some time. The children were doing what they were supposed to be doing at their age - have a carefree life, fun time, play games, do their favourite past time - seeing magic and doing drawing and painting. These events are definitely stress busters for parents as well as children. The informal contact with doctors and other medical and paramedical personnel brings them all closer, which would lead to better interaction, reduce

drop-out rates, alleviate their tension to some extent ultimately improving the child's and parents' social well being apart from better care and cure. Seeing other children who have completed therapy and are cured and leading a normal life gives them the strength and hope that one day, their child will also join the group.

■ What causes cancer in children?

Cancers that develop in children are often different from the types that develop in adults. Childhood cancers are often the result of DNA changes in cells that take place very early in life, sometimes even before birth. Unlike many cancers in adults, childhood cancers are not strongly linked to lifestyle or environmental risk factors. Though there are some exceptions, but childhood cancers tend to respond to treatments much better and have high cure rates than their adult counterparts. Children's bodies also tend to handle chemotherapy better than adults' bodies do. But, can-

'GENTLE CARE HELPED 4 YEAR OLD ANITA COPE WITH CANCER TREATMENT'

Four year old Anita Warriar (name changed to protect identity) plays with her schoolmates but her teacher does not allow her to exert too much. The child was diagnosed with leukemia in November last year and was in and out of the hospital for chemotherapy to treat the cancer afflicting the blood cells.

"It was a shock and was not easy for us to accept that our little girl had cancer. We were under a lot of stress especially when she was undergoing chemotherapy and knowing what she was going through at such a young age," Anita's father reveals with emotion.

When doctors at Manipal Hospital explained that childhood cancer had a higher cure rate due to the advances in treatment and medications, and it can be 90 percent cured, the parents were reassured of their child's speedy recovery.

During Anita's stay at the hospital, Charlotte Rosline Soans, the Child Life Specialist, from Priyanka Foundation, and Diya Ballal, a young volunteer, would visit each ward the children were kept secluded in to prevent infection.

"Through playing with toys and story-telling sessions, they gently told Anita about other children having the illness just like she did," Warriar says. "These activities reduced the stress in the children and the parents, and helped in the recovery process. We were also mentally prepared to face the challenges of the condition. Since the treatment for 6-7 months involved three phases in the entire period, we had to frequently bring Anita to the hospital and stay there for days for the chemotherapy. Sometimes when she was adamant about taking her medicines, we would call for Charlotte and Dia and they would gently soothe her and deftly handle the situation," he says with praise for the young girls who gave them psychological support and encouragement.

Anita is back at school and her parents, naturally, dote on her. Charlotte and Diya continue their work in the cancer ward for children, caring for these delicate ones with a gentle touch.



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