



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

30 June 2003

Secretary
HA Review Panel on SARS Outbreak
Hospital Authority Building
147B Argyle Street
Kowloon
Hong Kong

Dear Secretary,

Re: Submission for Review Panel on SARS Outbreak

Since early 1994, Playright has started the Hospital Play Service in the hospitals under Hospital Authority. During the outbreak of SARS, although we have to suspend the direct play service to the hospitalized children, we are still very concerned about their emotional and play needs at this stressful moment. With the support from Apple Daily Charitable Foundation, from April 2003 to mid-June 2003, we have distributed altogether 12,678 disposable play packs to hospitalized children in 11 hospitals. Through this project, we hope that our continuous care will help to reduce the anxiety of all hospitalized children. We also appreciated all the helps from the staff of different hospitals in distributing the play packs.

The distribution of play packs has been helpful in that critical moment, but it was not enough. With our experience in working with the staff and hospitalized children in paediatric ward, we would like to share our concerns and suggestions for the Review Panel to consider. The hospitalized children are the most vulnerable group. Our Hospital Play Specialists are always ready to serve and go through any future difficult moment with them. We are hoping that in the near future, Hospital Play Specialist will formally become one of the important members in a paediatric care team for serving the hospitalized children.

Thank you very much for your attention to our concerns. Should you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at 2898 2922.

Yours sincerely,

Kathy Kin-ho Wong
Executive Director

**Submission for H.A. Review Panel on SARS Outbreak from
Playright Children's Play Association**

Concerning the special care needs of sick children at hospital, our Association has the feedback and suggestions in the following areas:

Hospitalized children need more than medical care

During the outbreak of SARS, the Hospitals have to focus on how to cure the disease and avoid cross infection. However, the psychosocial and play needs of all sick children during this stressful moment have been neglected. This has affected not just the children suffering from SARS, but all hospitalized children. We understand the necessity of various measures, but they could be handled in a better way to minimize the potential traumatic experience on the part of these hospitalized children.

Hospitalization was already a stressful experience for children. They were confronted with unfamiliar surroundings and strange faces that wear all the protective mask, cap, eye-shield and gown etc. Not to mention about their potential fear of the disease, treatment procedures, pain, machines and medical instruments. Children are less mature in coping with all these stress and need extra care and service to support their recovering.

Play has healing effect to the Hospitalized children

Play as an important tool in the effective management of fears and anxieties of hospitalized children has been well documented. Play services in hospital will help to reduce the emotional distress in the children and at the same time increase children's ability to cope with the hospitalized experience in a positive way. Through play children understand their illness, treatment, what is happening to them and allow them to express fears, worries and even aggressive feelings. All these are essential, but are not well considered.

Since our Hospital Play Specialist was not allowed to provide play service in the paediatric wards during the SARS outbreak, we designed disposable play packs and sent to hospitalize children on daily basis. To a certain extent, these play packs served the functions of releasing children's anxiety, stress and boredom during hospitalization, but its success relies heavily on the self monitoring on the

part of children and timing on the part of nurses. It certainly cannot replace the impact of direct play service for the children.

Parents and Volunteers role has been diminished

The limiting or even forbidding parental or caretakers' visit to children has devastating effect on hospitalized children. The children were lacking of direct loving care from parents or caretakers. At the same time, the nursing staff was too busy to have long stay with the child patients. Some children had suffered from separation anxiety and psychological stress during this critical moment.

Previously, parents and volunteers played an important role in supporting and fulfilling the play need of hospitalized children when there is no direct play service. Our Hospital Play Specialists have provided various training workshops for volunteers, medical staff and even parents to help them to provide play. However, the restriction on visiting arrangement has greatly affected the involvement of parents and volunteers. The question on how the play need of hospitalized children be met becomes a real concern. The question will not go away as we understand the Hospital Authority has to revise their policy to cater for future possible outbreak of SARS or other kind of diseases.

Hospital Play Specialist should be a staff member of the paediatric team

Hospitalized children need play to help them understand and distract from painful medical procedures and treatment, express anxiety and normalize their life in hospital. The Hospital Play Specialist will help children to adapt through play and promote a more positive experience towards the hospitalization. The service is meaningful not only to children in general paediatric wards, but also to children in isolation wards. It has been shown in Sweden that play, together with parent's active co-operation, reduced the length of stay for children in hospital.

At present, there are only two full time Hospital Play Specialists providing direct play service in Princess Margaret Hospital and United Christian Hospital. And the one at Princess Margaret Hospital is only treated as volunteer. The situation must be actively reviewed, in view of the changing condition in existing hospitals. Being part of the paediatric team, the Hospital Play Specialist will use play to co-work with other hospital staff during any future crisis of disease

outbreak.

The resources/ equipments for hospitalized children should be reviewed

The outbreak of SARS has urged us to review on the existing provision of play facilities for children in hospitals. With limited suitable facilities and human resources, it has been difficult for hospitals and Hospital Authority to provide better care for sick children in hospital. As the visitation arrangement changed and most sick children were being isolated, the Hospital Authority should think of adding equipments and resources to fill in the gap of the situation. The followings are ideas for consideration:

- To improve the ward environment to make it friendlier to the children, especially the isolation room.
- To add and provide easy to clean toys and play facilities to cater for the need of children in isolation rooms, and to prevent transmission of disease.
- To make sure there are phone facilities for children to contact their family members to receive psychological support during hospitalization.
- To have Hospital Play Specialist in ward to care for the play needs and psychosocial needs of the children in hospitals directly.

Prepared by: Playright Children's Play Association
18A, Block F, 3 Lok Man Road
Chai Wan, Hong Kong
Tel: 2898-2922 Fax: 2898-4539
Email: info@playright.org.hk

Contact Persons: Kathy Wong, Executive Director
Blondi Kwok, Community and Hospital Play Manager

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