

Hospital Play and Child Life Therapy in Australia: A Short History



ACLTA acknowledges the Australian pioneers of play and psychosocial care in paediatric healthcare, with great thanks



Awareness Builds

An awareness of the need to support children through hospitalisation using play began to spread - alongside contemporary developments in the fields of child development and psychology. Nurses and volunteers in particular began facilitating play activities for young children where time allowed.

Emma Plank, an early pioneer of the Child Life profession in the USA, authored the book "Working With Children in Hospitals" in 1962, based on her early work at Cleveland City Hospital.

Anecdotally, we know that "play ladies" (sometimes known as play leaders or activity coordinators) began to appear throughout Australia - from the Princess Margaret Hospital for Children in Perth, to regional hospitals in NSW. Over time, some volunteer positions became paid - usually reporting to a Nurse Unit Manager.

Association Beginnings

The Association of Recreationists and Play Specialists (ARPS) is active - holding monthly meetings in Sydney for 'play recreationalists' both paid and volunteer, and interested members of the public. Yearly membership is \$10.

Sue Davis, appointed as Research and Development Officer for the Association, works to make contact with "country play recreationalists" - including visits to Newcastle, Wallsend, Lismore, Grafton, Armidale and Taree. Sue also wrote letters and sent information on the "specific needs of hospitalised children" to hospitals and tertiary education providers as part of an awareness campaign.

Additionally, Sue coordinated the case for an industrial award for play recreationalists in NSW hospitals; and endeavoured to create hospital familiarisation resources relevant to an Australian context.

Pre-1960s

1960s

1973

1983

1984

The Hospital Experience

The rapid technological and social/ cultural changes of the early 20th century led to the medical advancement of complex procedures, immunisations and pharmacological treatments for infections and many other illnesses. It became more common to come to hospital for the treatment of illness, rather than staying in the home.

With these amazing advancements came challenges. Alongside physical conditions causing distress, psychological stressors for children in hospital were extensive (Robertson, 1958) - for example, until the late 1950s, visiting hours for parents of paediatric patients were extremely limited. At some facilities, visiting was restricted to Sunday afternoons only (Cornwall, 2005).

Siblings of hospitalised children, in most circumstances, were discouraged from visiting altogether, due to a concern about the risk of cross infection (Cornwall, 2005).

People Power and AWCH

Locally, the Association for the Welfare of Children in Healthcare (AWCH) was formed (later becoming Association for the Wellbeing of Children in Healthcare).

The Association comprised of concerned professionals and passionate community members, after a report by the Australian & New Zealand College of Psychiatrists "identify[ed] psychological and emotional damage to young children from hospital neglect of non-medical needs." (AWCH, 2014)

Throughout the 70s, 80s and 90s, AWCH pioneered policy, resources and professional development, as the voice for child-focused, family-centred care in paediatrics. They continue this work today.

Needing Support

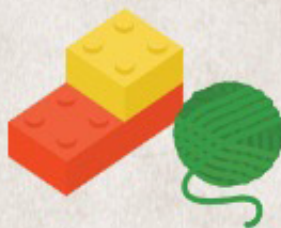
ARPS meet at the 'Children's Resource and Development Limited' offices in Sydney. They aimed to create a place where isolated play leaders, from hospitals and other settings, could join together - needing "all the support they could get." One section from Minutes taken mentions the formation of a Dept of Play, Education and Recreation at Royal Children's Hospital (Melbourne) - and how the RCH team were keen to form a specific association for "hospital play staff".





AAHPS Begins

The first meeting of the Australasian Association of Hospital Play Specialists [AAHPS] is held on February 27th at Royal Children's Hospital [RCH] Melbourne.



AAHPS Newsletters

Publication of Issue 1 of the "Newsletter for Hospital Play Specialists in Australia and New Zealand" is distributed.

The newsletters listed resources, stories from those in the field, and activity suggestions. In Issue 2, Margaret Klucis [Senior Play Specialist at RCH] writes:

I wish you every success in your work in the development of programs that prevent emotional trauma, promote caring and loving, and enrich children's lives. By working harmoniously with fellow health workers an example can be set, which may lead to expansion of the awareness of the importance of play to the sick child and family. May you all find joy in the development of your work and peace in the recognition of doing something worthwhile for children, for yourselves and for the community.

1986

Hospital Play Policy

AWCH publishes their first version of a "Recommended Policy Relating to the Provision of Play in Hospital". Copies of this document were sent to facilities across the country.



1987

1988

International Travels

Rhonda Barson from RCH receives a 'Travelling Scholarship' from her workplace to travel to the USA, Canada, England and Sweden, to study play and child life departments in paediatric settings. She visited 25 sites! One of her comments to AAHPS members states:

My own interest in the area of preparing children for procedures has grown enormously and this is where I would like to concentrate my work for some time. It is difficult to do this within the play program because of the demands on our time; a problem that will not be resolved easily.

1989

1993

NZ Conference

A New Zealand National Conference for hospital play specialists and hospital school teachers was held in May, in Auckland. Joan Kingson [Co-Chairperson for the Education Committee of the Child Life Council USA] attended as facilitator. Six Australian hospital play specialists also attended.





Symposium for Play Specialists

AWCH hosts a 'Symposium for Play Specialists' on October 6th in Sydney. This included discussion about a Bachelor of Health Science [Play Specialty], and Postgraduate Diploma in Play Specialty, at University of Western Sydney; and the potential for a hospital play specialist accreditation process.

'Play Therapy Week'

AAHPS began promoting 'Play Therapy Week' in the month of October; and AAHPS Conference is also held at CHW, Sydney.



1996

Australia and NZ create separate Hospital Play Associations

Following an AAHPS Annual Conference Meeting, a steering committee was established for a New Zealand Hospital Play Specialist Association.



The two countries officially formed separate associations by September - the Australian Association of Hospital Play Specialists; and the Hospital Play Specialists Association of Aotearoa/New Zealand.

1999



2001

AAHPS Conference & Networking

An AAHPS Conference is held at RCH Melbourne during November.

Sydney Children's Hospital [SCH] hosted a NSW State Networking event; these event ran successfully in the coming years at SCH, Children's Hospital at Westmead [CHW] and Bear Cottage.

2005

Member Teleconferences

Regular AAHPS member teleconferences are held to facilitate the sharing of ideas, alongside the regular newsletter. The 3rd Biennial AAHPS Conference is held at RCH Melbourne in March.

2007



5th Biennial Conference

SCH and CHW jointly host the 2011 AAHPS Conference at Sebel Pier One in Sydney. Dr Amy Baxter, creator of Buzzy4Shots; and Margaret Sims PhD, Early Childhood Lecturer and Researcher, lead as keynote speakers. The first AAHPS website, aahps.org.au, is launched alongside a refreshed association logo.

Time for Big Changes

A Professional Accreditation process is passed in by member vote; the first member survey is collated; a Membership Portal is created on the website.

In June, Camp Quality supports a National Strategic Forum on Hospital Play in Sydney - with representatives from the profession flown in from around the country. The group debate and decide on future directions for AAHPS and the profession of Hospital Play in Australia. Moving forward, a focus on advocacy is recognised as key, in order to safeguard and expand the role of the profession.

After the Forum, an AAHPS member vote is held on changing our professional title to Child Life Therapist, and the association name to Association of Child Life Therapists Australia (ACLTA) - with the aim to promote unity in job title nationally. 'Child Life' aligns us with other like professionals across the world. This change is passed by members, and a switchover date is set for November 17 - alongside the relaunch of the website at www.childlife.org.au.

Working parties are formed to develop scope of practice guidelines; training guidelines for recently employed practitioners; a statement on the development of a postgraduate qualification; and a framework for preferred undergraduate qualifications for new recruits.

National Benchmarking is completed, revealing that as of September 2014 there were 92 child life therapists employed across Australia, sharing 70 full time equivalent (FTE) positions; there is an average ratio of 1 FTE to 33 paediatric beds where service exists. Only 68% of the paediatric beds surveyed had access to a child life therapist at their site [NSW/ACT/SA/VIC/TAS/NT/WA].

2009

4th Biennial Conference

The 2009 AAHPS Conference is held at the Coogee Bay Hotel, by SCH. The keynote speakers are Chris Brown, Director of Child Life and Family Centred Care at Dell Children's Medical Centre Texas; and Anne Cutler, Executive Officer of AWCH.

2011



2013

New Directions

A recently rebuilt RCH Melbourne hosts the AAHPS Conference - with keynote speakers Laura Gaynard PhD (author of Psychosocial Care of Children in Hospitals: A Clinical Practice Manual); and Nicola Woollaston, Hospital Play Specialist and Supervisor.

The AAHPS Executive makes constitutional changes to create the role of Professional Development Coordinator, and expand the opportunity for State Representatives to be elected from each Australian state and territory. AAHPS also begins to offer professional development webinars; and a Facebook page, Twitter account and Pinterest board are launched as part of association social media.

Also in 2013, the Australian children's cancer charity Camp Quality begins to fund the employment of hospital play specialists in paediatric oncology units in children's hospitals - starting with SCH, CHW, John Hunter Children's Hospital (Newcastle) and RCH Melbourne. In collaboration with AAHPS, Camp Quality also fund a project officer (Cara Dahl) to work with the association Executive on the development of the profession in Australia. The project aims to look at the potential for professional accreditation; fostering unity between sites and states; national benchmarking; increasing membership; and the creation of a strategic plan.

2014

There is still so much more to come for Child Life Therapy in Australia - we can't wait to see what the future holds!

