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Major: Psychology
Graduation Year: 2019
Job Title: Child Life Specialist

What is the day in the life like in your job>

As a Certified Child Life Specialist (CCLS), it is my goal to promote development and to minimize psychosocial trauma in children and young adults related to health care and hospitalization. I work primarily with teen and young adult patients with a cancer diagnosis.

To start the day, I print the patient censuses, which is an overview of the current patients admitted to the hematology/oncology unit. I then prioritize the patients I will see. My day is also dependent on the needs of my patients that may arise, so it's important to be flexible. On a typical day, I will provide diagnosis education, prepare for procedures, and provide opportunities for therapeutic conversations. Working with an older patient population, I spend time building rapport with patients and families. Rapport building oftentimes is simply getting to know the patient and family by normalizing the hospital environment and engaging in activities they enjoy. I also support patients and families nearing end of life through coping and emotional support.

What do you love about your job?

As a child life specialist, I love having the opportunity to see a once anxious and fearful teenager get through a difficult experience with the coping skills I was able to provide. Celebrating a patient's last chemotherapy treatment and having the opportunity to be a part of such a monumental treatment milestone will forever be rewarding as well.

What is challenging about your role?

Although there are many days filled with laughter and celebrations, there are also heavy and challenging moments as well. As a specialist, I provide bereavement support to patients and families nearing the end of life by offering emotional support and creating legacy. Death is never something easy to talk about openly but having a trusting relationship with a patient and family oftentimes makes those difficult conversation more therapeutic and meaningful.

What are the benefits of working in this field?

Being able to work in a hospital setting and having the opportunity to collaborate and work alongside other members of the healthcare team.

What experiences did you have that prepared you for this role?

As an undergraduate student, I gained strong child life volunteer experience in a hospital setting. I also gained volunteer experience with well children outside of the hospital setting. I ensured I enrolled in strong course work to meet all educational requirements required by the ACLP. I networked, grew in knowledge and understanding, and completed a child life practicum and internship.

What do you see happening in the future for these types of careers?

The realization of the field of child life is rapidly growing and I would also say the profession itself is growing as well.

What should a student know about your field?

It is important for students pursuing child life to be prepared to be mobile. This is due to the limited number of child life practicum and internship opportunities and even professional job opportunities.

What advice do you have for a student considering a career in your profession?

I suggest joining the Association of Child Life Professionals (ACLP). There is a wealth of information available for student interested in pursuing child life. It is also a great resource for networking with other students and professionals, and a help in answering questions you have regarding the profession. Information regarding requirements to become a Certified Child Life Specialist can also be found through the ACLP. I also suggest gaining as much knowledge and exposure to the child life profession as you can. This can include becoming a child life volunteer, research opportunities, camps, etc. A strong knowledge and valuable experiences will help you become a more mature candidate when time to pursue practicum and internship experiences.