

She Gives Antidotes for Child's Fears

One seven-year-old, faced with having the stitches taken out of a recently healed gash on his forehead, was sure that his head would pop open when the threads were removed.

Another little girl was afraid she would never be able to speak again after she had her tonsils out.

To an adult, such fears are silly. To a child, in the strange environment of a hospital, they're real.

In an attempt to provide enhanced emotional support for the frightened, hospitalized child, the Medical Center has added a recreation therapist to its pediatric staff.

Called Sally by the children, Sara Francis helps Duke's pediatric patients develop a more normal, less threatening environment through playing.

"When you supervise him at play," Miss Francis explained, "you can get to know a child and earn his trust in a way no medical person can. You try to uncover his fears about his illness and the medical procedures he must undergo and then do everything you can to help him cope with these fears."

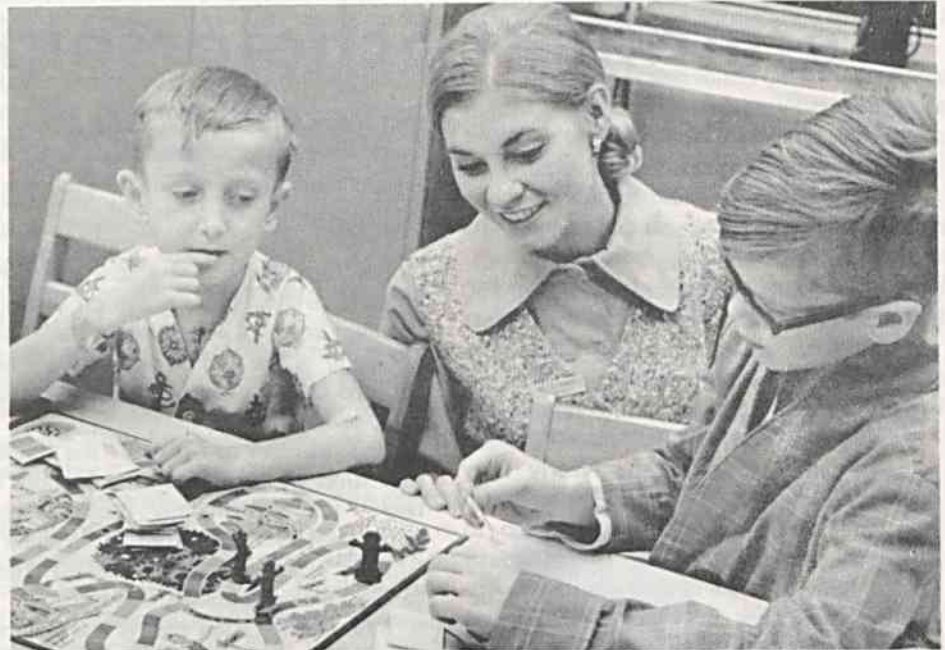
One novel way by which Miss Francis learns about a child's reaction to his hospitalization is through "doctor play."

The kids play with dolls dressed as doctors and nurses to act out hospital scenes. "It often eases a child's hostility to his surroundings when he can reverse reality and give his doctor-doll an injection!" Miss Francis said.

Dr. Samuel Katz, chairman of Duke's Department of Pediatrics, said that the addition of a recreation therapist is another step toward meeting the needs of the total child.

He explained that a healthy child at home learns about the world around him through play. "We are trying to continue that growth while he is in the hospital," Dr. Katz said, "and to help him cope with the fears and anxieties of hospitalization."

The recreation program for children on Duke's two pediatric wards at the present time includes a morning group playroom for those children who can stay out of bed. After the usual afternoon rest period, another play session is set in the afternoon followed by dinner served in the playroom.



THERAPEUTIC PLAY—Sara Francis, Duke's new recreation therapist, explains a new game to two pediatric patients in the playroom located across the hall from Howland ward. (photo by Thad Sparks)

For bedridden patients, Miss Francis keeps a large supply of toys and books that children can enjoy without much physical activity.

As she builds the recreation therapy program at Duke, Miss Francis hopes to institute special play activities for children who are scheduled for new and consequently frightening medical procedures.

For example, a child may need cardiac catheterization, a procedure to determine if and how his heart is damaged. Miss Francis would construct a miniature of each piece of equipment in the laboratory and then present a puppet show for the child to show him what happens.

The patient could then play with the puppets and their junior-size laboratory and act out his own script. Such familiarization with potentially frightening activities can help to allay a child's fears when it's his turn for the catheterization.

After the procedure, the child could continue to play with the puppets to explain to his parents, other children, and even Miss Francis just what happened and how he feels about it. "This way he can express himself instead of keeping his tensions all bottled up inside," Miss Francis said.

She explained that Duke's interest in recreation therapy is part of a growing national trend to recognize the importance of play to the development of hospitalized children. "As the program continues," she added, "we hope to expand therapy to the outpatient clinics."

Miss Francis, a native of El Centro, Calif., earned her undergraduate degree in education at the University of Alabama and her master's in therapeutic recreation at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill.

She is a member of the American Association of Child Care in Hospitals and the National Therapeutic Recreation Association.

Obituary

Mr. Bryant B. Montague, a Medical Center employe for a number of years, died at Duke Hospital at the end of September.

Mr. Montague, formerly of Roxboro, worked with the air conditioning and refrigeration service.

He is survived by his wife, Judy.