

Between the paint and the cupcakes — Friends in the Playroom

It's a place where you can really let your hair down and play with things like wooden blocks, tempera paint, cupcake frosting and friends.

It's a place where there are nearly always holidays or other special occasions to celebrate — like birthdays or a magic show.

There are a lot of things going on in the pediatric playroom and Director of Recreation Therapy for Pediatrics Sue Lynch is always looking for more and better ways to help the young patients of Matas, Rankin and Howland wards, ranging in age from a few months to 21 years old. "be more free to express their feelings.

"Our main goal is to support the child emotionally while he is in the hospital," she said. "The hospital can be a traumatic and scary place when you're alone, away from your parents and you don't understand what they're doing to you. We try to help by providing play, which is really a child's type of work."

The playroom opens its doors five days a week and for a couple of hours on Saturday afternoons. There are extras, too, like Wednesday night activities catered to the interests and needs of adolescents.

Thursday night is reserved for cooking up dishes especially suited for youthful palates and Wednesday mornings bring the opportunity for parents and the pediatrics staff to have a coffee hour all to themselves.



SUE LYNCH

"We work in conjunction with the doctors and nurses," Ms. Lynch said, "and refer to them any problems we observe in the playroom. The child's freedom to be himself in the playroom gives us the opportunity to observe him and any misconception or anxiety he might have about his hospital experience.

"We can also observe children scheduled for surgery and zero in on their anxiety," she continued. "We even have 'doctor equipment' in the playroom. We support them and tell them it's okay to be afraid."

The littlest ones in the intensive care nursery and the nurseries on Howland and Matas wards are provided with mobiles and all kinds of toys to promote tactile and visual stimulation. "We try to get them out of their cribs so they can experience things like noise and sun and better discriminate between colors," Ms. Lynch said.

Staffed by two full-time play therapists, including Loretta Crawford and Ms. Lynch, and Kathy Merritt, a part-time play therapist, the playroom is manned largely by work-study and volunteering Duke students as well as graduate student interns from Chapel Hill.



MAGICAL CURE—Pre-medical student Tray Dunaway doubles up on his spare time and medicinal expertise when he dons his top hat and goes to bat with his magic cane for pediatric patients every other Saturday afternoon in the pediatric playroom. (Photo by Margaret Howell)



CHEERFUL UNDERSTANDING—The parent of a hospitalized child gets a few words of encouragement along with a cup of coffee and doughnuts from Brandon McDaniel, pediatric social worker.



A HELPING HAND—Volunteer Mark Greer makes eating ice cream at the playroom's parties more fun and friendly than ever.