



KEY POINT SUMMARY

OBJECTIVES

To identify and apply the expertise of child life experts in order to better understand their perspective on important features within hospital playrooms.

Child life specialists' evaluation of hospital playroom design: A mixed method inquiry

Weinberger, N., Butler, A. G., McGee, B., Schumacher, P. A., & Brown, R. L. 2017 | *Journal of Interior Design*. Volume 42, Issue 2, Pages 71-91

Key Concepts/Context

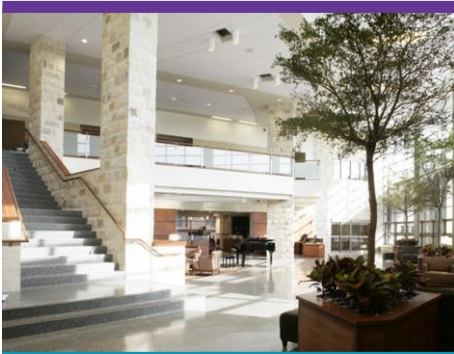
Many children are hospitalized with chronic illnesses each year, experiences that may result in traumatic repercussions with lasting negative health effects as children grow older. Child life experts are individuals who help children and their families cope with the stresses and uncertainties of hospitalization. The presence of these experts within healthcare facilities is generally regarded as an indicator of high-quality treatment due to the proven efficacy of child life services. Because child life experts conduct most of their work in hospital playrooms, it is important for researchers to understand how the physical design of these rooms can help further enhance child life services in general.

Methods

90 child life specialists with varying degrees of work experience participated in a five-part electronic survey. The five sections of this survey included: participant demographic and background information, a series of six playroom photographs, 14 items for rating the importance of items within the six playrooms, a section for open responses regarding the playrooms, and a final section that allowed participants to rank the rooms according to their ability to promote child life goals. A collection of frequently mentioned and highly favored playroom features was compiled and analyzed.

Findings

Results found that child life experts most commonly preferred playrooms featuring biophilic elements, open spaces, and aesthetically pleasing décor and color. Biophilic elements such as natural lighting, window views, and nature themes were notably of high importance. Accordingly, the playroom that was consistently ranked the lowest by survey participants featured no natural elements. Findings also indicated that a



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multitude of play options for hospitalized children, such as sensory-motor and pretend play, should always be available.

Limitations

Only child life specialists were surveyed in this study; no children or family members provided perspectives on these design features. Playroom spaces were judged based off of photographs that might not have been accurate representations of the playrooms themselves, thus potentially affecting participant perceptions. This study focuses on hospital playrooms specifically; other areas of the hospital that hold children for extended periods of time were not studied.

Design Implications

Child life experts involved in this study largely agreed that biophilic elements, such as access to natural lighting, window views, and nature-themed and playful décor and colors are highly important design elements within hospital playrooms that can promote overall patient well-being in both the short term and long term. Other important elements noted by child life specialists were storage options such as bins and shelving, soft mats for infants, tables of varying heights, clear floor spaces, and the availability of playthings for the children.

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