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**"Jockey Club Child Life Care Project: 2023 Asia Child Life Symposium"**  
**Bringing together international industry professionals for online and offline**  
**participation to discuss Child Life Services**  
**promoting future development in Asia**



*The "Jockey Club Child Life Care Project: 2023 Asia Child Life Symposium," funded by The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust and organised by the Children's Cancer Foundation, in collaboration with The Hong Kong Polytechnic University Department of Health Technology and Informatics, was successfully held on August 12, 2023, at the Lu Guan Qiu Lecture Theatre of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. The event attracted over 300 healthcare professionals who attended both online and offline.*

Child Life Services are crucial in addressing the psychological needs of sick children. In the United States, the ratio of children to certified Child Life Specialists is 1 to 13,000. However, in Hong Kong, the ratio is 1 to 115,000, highlighting a significant shortfall. This underlines the need for broader recognition and value of this service in the Asian region. To promote the development of Child Life Services in Asia, the "Jockey Club Child Life Care Project: 2023 Asia Child Life Symposium"(Symposium) funded by The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust (the Trust) and organised by the Children's Cancer Foundation (CCF), in collaboration with the Hong Kong Polytechnic University Department of Health Technology and Informatics, was successfully held on August 12, 2023, at the Lu Guan Qiu Lecture Theatre of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. The event brought together

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global experts to share and explore viable service models, enhance professional exchanges, and comprehensively improve the understanding of Child Life Services among paediatric practitioners in Hong Kong, Mainland China, and other Asian regions. Together, they aim to raise awareness and drive the future development of Child Life Services in Asia.



Several officials, medical professionals, and industry representatives were invited to attend the "Jockey Club Child Life Care Project: 2023 Asia Child Life Symposium" From left to right, including Mr. Tony Kwok Chung Ho, Chairman, Children's Cancer Foundation; Dr. Pamela Sze-pui Tin, Research Director, Chief Executive's Policy Unit; Dr. Michael Lap Gate Wong, Director (Quality & Safety), Hospital Authority; Mr. Horace Hoo-yin Lit, Executive Manager, Charities (Healthy Community), The Hong Kong Jockey Club; Dr. Libby Ha-yun Lee, JP, Under Secretary for Health; Prof. David Hoo-keung Shum, Yeung Tsang Wing Yee and Tsang Wing Hing Professor in Neuropsychology, Chair Professor of Neuropsychology and Dean of Faculty of Health and Social Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University; Prof. Shea-ping Yip, Chair Professor of Diagnostic Science and Molecular Genetics and Head of Department of Health Technology and Informatics, Faculty of Health and Social Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University; Ms. Vera Chin, Chief Executive Officer of the Children's Cancer Foundation.

The event attracted over three hundred healthcare professionals who attended both online and offline. Several officials, medical professionals, and industry representatives were invited to attend, including **Dr. Libby Ha-yun Lee, JP**, Under Secretary for Health; **Dr. Michael Lap Gate Wong**, Director (Quality & Safety), Hospital Authority; **Dr. Pamela Sze-pui Tin**, Research Director, Chief Executive's Policy Unit; **Mr. Horace Hoo-yin Lit**, Executive Manager, Charities (Healthy Community), The Hong Kong Jockey Club, **Prof. David Hoo-keung Shum**, Yeung Tsang Wing Yee and Tsang Wing Hing Professor in Neuropsychology, Chair Professor of Neuropsychology and Dean of Faculty of Health and Social Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University; **Prof. Shea-ping Yip**, Chair Professor of Diagnostic Science and Molecular Genetics and Head of Department of Health Technology and Informatics, Faculty of Health and Social Sciences, The Hong Kong

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Polytechnic University; **Mr. Tony Kwok Chung Ho**, Chairman, Children's Cancer Foundation who jointly hosted the event.



*Mr. Tony Kwok Chung Ho, Chairman, Children's Cancer Foundation, expressed that Child Life Services have gained significant recognition worldwide in the past decades. He hopes to collaborate with partner organisations to promote this highly meaningful service and increase awareness of Child Life and its importance.*

Mr. Tony Kwok said in his speech: Child Life Services have gained widespread recognition globally over the past decades. The Children's Cancer Foundation's advocacy for a holistic child life approach, including play and stress relief exercises to aid recovery and boost children's confidence. With increasing recognition from medical partners and parents in Hong Kong, the current demand for Child Life Specialists far exceeds supply. The Foundation hopes to promote this very meaningful service in partnership with others, helping more people understand the importance of Child Life.

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*Dr. Libby Ha-yun Lee, JP, Under Secretary for Health highlighted in her speech that the government has spared no effort in promoting child health over the years.*

Dr. Libby Ha-yun Lee, JP, Under Secretary for Health pointed out in her speech: For many years, the government has spared no effort in promoting children's health. Hong Kong Children's Hospital and other paediatric units within the Hospital Authority have adopted traditional and branch models to promote the provision of quality healthcare actions, a measure that not only covers children with cancer, but also benefits their families, providing a good support environment for patients and caregivers.

The Children's Cancer Foundation, as a pioneer in children's health services, is the first non-profit organisation in Hong Kong to adopt professional Child Life Service, including training, and has adopted the service standards of Child Life Service for paediatric patients from the United States. In fact, the Foundation and the Hospital Authority have launched pilot projects for Child Life Service at Hong Kong Children's Hospital, Tuen Mun Hospital, and United Christian Hospital. The Child Life Specialist supervisor, coordinator, medical professionals, and multidisciplinary teams across departments work hard to provide comprehensive strategies to care for children's physical, emotional and spiritual needs.

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*Dr. Michael Lap-gate Wong, Director (Quality & Safety), Hospital Authority, expressed his appreciation in his speech on behalf of the Hospital Authority for the Children's Cancer Foundation's long-standing support to children and families affected by cancer. He commended their dedication and unwavering commitment, which has made a significant impact on the lives of countless children.*

Dr. Michael Lap-gate Wong, Director (Quality & Safety), Hospital Authority, expressed gratitude for the Children's Cancer Foundation's long-standing support for children and families affected by cancer, praising its dedication and unwavering commitment to making a significant impact on countless children's lives.

He stressed that every child should receive the best care and support, especially during their fight against the disease. To this end, Hong Kong hospitals ensure that young patients receive the highest standard of psychological Child Life Services and treatment throughout their cancer journey. The Hospital Authority collaborates with the CCF to provide high-quality, patient-centred Child Life Services to children and families in need. This collaboration has a positive impact and simultaneously improves their quality of life.

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*Dr. Pamela Sze-pui Tin, Research Director, Chief Executive's Policy Unit, highlighted in her speech that the Children's Cancer Foundation's hosting of this symposium provides a valuable opportunity to foster the exchange of ideas, strategies, and innovations by inviting experts from around the world. Learning from the experiences of experts from different fields and incorporating their insights into the policy-making process is aimed at planning, examining, and promoting the well-being and policies related to children's health.*

Dr. Pamela Sze-pui Tin, Research Director, Chief Executive's Policy Unit, expressed in her speech: The Chief Executive's Policy Unit is committed to researching and advocating relevant long-term strategic policies, ensuring that children not only survive but thrive. As a research unit, the Chief Executive's Policy Unit actively participates in formulating forward-looking policies and highlighting areas that need attention in national development and engages with experts on many topic-related discussions.

She pointed out that the Children's Cancer Foundation's organisation of this symposium offers valuable opportunity by focusing on the new era development of Child Life Services and expressed her appreciation to the CCF for organising this symposium and for its unwavering commitment towards the lives of children with cancer and their families.

By inviting experts from around the world, insights and innovative service models can be shared to shape the future of child health. By focusing on the new era in child life, The Chief Executive's Policy Unit will not only address the current challenges that our children face but also discuss how to prepare them for a healthier future and to be part of this very significant event pulling true to different public policy to reimagine our approach to safeguard the well-being of our children.

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*Mr. Horace Hoo-yin Lit, Executive Manager, Charities (Healthy Community), The Hong Kong Jockey Club, stated in his speech that the Trust is dedicated to supporting the Children's Cancer Foundation. Through the joint efforts of both organisations, they aim to improve the quality of life for children and their families and promote the future development of Child Life Service.*

Mr. Horace Hoo-yin Lit, Executive Manager, Charities (Healthy Community), The Hong Kong Jockey Club, stated in his speech that Children's Cancer Foundation is the first organisation to introduce child life service for paediatric patients in Hong Kong. It has a long history of partnering with public hospitals. Starting from 2020, the Club's Charities Trust supported CCF to carry out the Jockey Club Child Life Care Project. The Project aims to provide better care and support for children in hospitals. Through thematic play activities, our children can have better understanding and get familiar with the diagnosis, treatment, or the operation arrangement. The Project can effectively help our children be more secure and mentally prepared for the medical procedure ahead.

In the past three years, the Project has served 18,500 children at the hospitals and supported some 6,000 parents in relevant activities. Moreover, the Project has trained over 400 healthcare professionals to build up the capacity of child life service in our healthcare system. With our concerted effort, we hope to continue improving the quality of life of our children who are undergoing medical procedures and relieve the stress of their families. The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust would continue seeking opportunities to enhance the health services in Hong Kong, including primary care, medical services, and palliative support for different age groups.

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Representatives from the Children's Cancer Foundation and hospital partners pose for a photo (from left to right): Mr. Tony Kwok Chung Ho, Chairman of Children's Cancer Foundation; Dr. Lap Ming Wong, Head of the paediatric and Adolescent Medicine Department at Tuen Mun Hospital; Dr. Frankie Wai Tsoi Cheng, Service Head (Paediatric Oncology) & Consultant, Department of Paediatrics and Adolescent Medicine, Hong Kong Children's Hospital; Dr. Michael Lap-gate Wong, Director (Quality & Safety) at Hospital Authority; Ms. Janice Po King Ma, President of the Hong Kong College of Paediatric Nursing and Department Operations Manager of the P&AM Department at United Christian Hospital; and Ms. Vera Ching Lan Chin, Chief Executive Officer of the Children's Cancer Foundation.

In addition, Ms. Alisha Saavedra, MA, CCLS, President (2023-2024) of the Association of Child Life Professionals in the United States, Dr. Frankie Wai Tsoi Cheng, Service Head (Paediatric Oncology) & Consultant, Department of Paediatrics and Adolescent Medicine, Hong Kong Children's Hospital, Dr. Rever Lee Chak Ho, Deputy Hospital Chief Executive and Consultant in paediatric and Adolescent Medicine at Tuen Mun Hospital, and Ms. Janice Po King Ma, President of the Hong Kong College of Paediatric Nursing and Department Operations Manager of the P&AM Department at United Christian Hospital, Ms. Carmen Ma, Professional Service Assistant Professional Service Manager of the CCF. Children's Cancer Foundation also attended the symposium. They shared insights on and the current state of Child Life Services in local hospitals bringing new perspectives and hope for providing children with higher-quality paediatric services.

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*The event was honoured to have international Child Life Specialists, Mr. Eugene Johnson (third from the left) and Ms. Stephanie Hopkins (third from the right), at the event. They graciously shared and presented a series of Child Life case studies and experiences.*

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*From left to right, Professor Chi Kong Li, Ms. Xiao Bo Zhang, Ms. Ji Hua Zhu, Ms. Evanny Guan-Wei Lee, and Dr. Angelita Sievert-Fernandez, PhD, CCLS, engaged in expert panel discussions. They shared insights on how different countries and regions in Asia utilise interactive methods to experience the daily work and professional skills of Child Life Services.*

Participants at the event enjoyed the panel discussion featuring a distinguished lineup of experts, moderated by Prof. Chi Kong Li, Research Professor, Department of Paediatrics, Faculty of Medicine, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, with healthcare professionals and Child Life specialist from Asia, including Ms. Xiao Bo Zhang, Vice President, Children's Hospital of Fudan University; Ms. Ji Hua Zhu, Chief Nurse, Children's Hospital of Zhejiang University School of Medicine; Ms. Evanny Guan-Wei Lee, Certified Child Life Specialist, MacKay Children's Hospital; and Dr. Angelita Sievert-Fernandez, PhD, CCLS, Executive Director, Kythe Foundation. In addition, CCF also organised workshops on Child Life Services, allowing participants to gain hands-on understanding of the day-to-day work and professional skills of Child Life Specialists.

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The conference also included workshops on Child Life Service, allowing participants to experience the daily work and professional skills of Child Life Specialists through interactive activities.

For two decades, The Children's Cancer Foundation has been dedicated to fostering the development of Child Life Services. It has earned recognition and support from healthcare professionals, young patients, and their parents in Hong Kong. The Foundation believes that Child Life Service can effectively address the emotional needs of children and assist them in facing the treatment challenges has been a driving force. The successful symposium has laid a solid foundation for the future development of Child Life Services in Asia.



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## **There are 6,000 Professional Child Life Specialists Worldwide, with Only 1.4% Based in Asia**

According to the latest statistics from the Association of Child Life Professionals (ACLP) in April 2023, there are over 6,000 certified Child Life Specialists worldwide. However, there are only 95 such professionals across all countries and regions in Asia, with only 9 practising in Hong Kong.

Also, a survey conducted by the Association of Child Life Professionals in 2020 revealed that more than 30% of children with cancer and their parents may experience Pediatric Medical Traumatic Stress. Moreover, more than 80% of the siblings of these young patients may suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

These findings underscore the critical importance of Child Life services in mitigating the long-term adverse effects of physical discomfort and emotional distress on children undergoing treatment, as well as in alleviating the stress on their families.

## **The Child Life Specialists are the superheroes of the paediatric ward and serve as important companions**

Child Life Specialists are often referred to as the ‘superheroes’ of the paediatric ward, playing a crucial role as companions. They understand the treatment procedures and psychological pressures that children face, and consider their needs carefully. They provide critical psychological support to paediatric patients and their families. Their work embodies a unique blend of medical knowledge, psychology, and counselling skills, enabling them to help children cope with pain, stress, and emotional challenges.

Child Life Specialists serve as important bridges between healthcare professionals, families, and the young patients. Their work involves building trust with young patients and their families, understanding their needs and concerns, and providing emotional support and psychological education. Child Life Specialists create a safe and positive space for children through activities such as play, art, storytelling, and other creative endeavours.

## **Child Life Specialists are facing significant shortages in Asia, and they encounter both challenges and opportunities.**

Despite the importance of their role, there is a significant shortage of Child Life Specialists in Asia and a need to raise awareness of their work. In the absence of Child Life Services, children may experience fear and increased difficulty in their treatment journeys due to a lack of understanding. This can also impose significant psychological and emotional burdens on both the child and their family. The Children's Cancer Foundation will continue to collaborate with relevant institutions to promote the training and professional development of Child Life Specialists. This will facilitate the growth of Child Life Services in Asia, ensuring that children receive holistic care throughout their treatment process.



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**Organising conferences and workshops to share best practices from around the world would be an excellent initiative**

The symposium featured 5 workshops that highlighted the importance of multidisciplinary teamwork for paediatric holistic care. The workshops included: The Role of Medical Art in a Paediatric Healthcare Environment, The Power of Messy Play, Roles of Child Life Specialist to Support Children and Families at the End of Life in US and HK, Supporting Children to Complete the 'Impossible Mission': Pre-Radiotherapy Education Workshop and Empowering Children: Utilising Immersive Reality for Pediatric Radiotherapy.