

Children's Health

Make-Believe Clinic Teaches Children ABCs Of Health Care

(NAPSA)—When lions, tigers and bears need a check-up, it usually means a trip to the vet. But for hundreds of the cuddly, stuffed animals, treatment can also be found at the “Teddy Bear Clinic” at the Intermountain Shriners Hospital for Children in Salt Lake City.

Several times a year, kindergartners bring their teddy bears and other stuffed animals to a fun and educational make-believe clinic, where laughter and cookies prove to be the best medicine.

“We want children to see that the hospital can be a friendly place,” explained Child Life Specialist Debbie Condren. She said the goals of the clinic are to educate children about medical procedures and help reduce a child’s anxiety about going to the hospital.

Since its inception eight years ago, the Teddy Bear Clinic has become a field trip favorite among local educators. Jennifer Vasquez, a local kindergarten teacher, brought a new class to the clinic after attending it for the first time last year.

“The kids love it. Hopefully, they feel more comfortable about going to the hospital after being here,” she said.

First, the children listen to a brief introduction by clinic organizers, then the children check in and each furry “patient” is given an ID bracelet and a health record. Hospital staff fills in the height, weight and vital signs on the stuffed animals. They also take time to explain each procedure in detail and encourage the kindergartners to ask questions as the children move from station to station, laughing and giggling.

The Teddy Bear Clinic simulates a regular visit to the doctor and teaches children about how X-rays are taken, how a blood pressure cuff is used, what the anesthesia mask feels like, how body temperature is measured and even how to apply a plaster cast.

“We’ve had broken legs, arms and tails,” joked Kevin Martin, director of patient care services.

Martin attempts to apply a cast to the fractured tail of a little grey mouse named “Cheddar.” A few tables down, Nurse Practitioner Susan Conner examines the ears, eyes and mouths of bears, cats, dolphins and even an octopus. The children smile when she gives each a clean bill of health. At another station, Social Worker



Child Life Specialist Debbie Condren demonstrates how a cast is applied to a youngster’s furry friend.

Shalee Rancour explains anatomy and shows the children X-rays of hands, arms and legs.

While most children who come to the Teddy Bear Clinic have been to a doctor’s office before, few have been to the Shriners Hospital. The clinic is also an excellent community outreach tool and an opportunity to introduce teachers and parents to the hospital’s many services.

As one group of children takes its stuffed animals through the clinic, another goes on a short walking tour around the hospital.

Each child also receives a grab bag filled with latex gloves, a surgical mask and bonnet so they can talk about the experience when they get home. And no visit to the doctor would be complete without a treat: a teddy bear-shaped cookie.

For more information on Shriners’ network of 22 hospitals that provide medical care and services totally free of charge to children with orthopaedic problems, burns and spinal cord injuries, write to: Shriners International Headquarters, Public Relations Dept., 2900 Rocky Point Dr., Tampa, FL 33607, or visit the Web site at www.shrinershq.org. Treatment is provided to children under age 18 without regard to race, religion or relationship to a Shriner.

If you know a child Shriners can help, call 1-800-237-5055 in the United States, or 1-800-361-7256 in Canada.