

UW Health: Psychologist highlights the importance of mental health throughout pediatric cancer care

Posted on Tuesday, Feb 15, 2022

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

MADISON, Wis. – Today is International Childhood Cancer Day, and one UW Health Kids expert is sharing her perspective on the importance of mental health throughout a family's childhood cancer care journey.

Hundreds of children are diagnosed with cancer in Wisconsin every year, according to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, and there are several needs that come along with that, from treatment options to supportive services.

For those diagnosed and treated at the American Family Children's Hospital, mental health support is built into a patient's care team, according to Stephanie Farrell, PhD, pediatric health psychologist, UW Health Kids.

"We are there to support families through diagnosis and treatment," she said. "We listen to them and create a safe space for them to process the medical trauma they are enduring."

Farrell notes how hard the pandemic has made an already challenging situation like a cancer diagnosis for a child.

"Many of these children become immunocompromised, making COVID-19 even more worrisome for families," she said. "The pandemic has also been quite isolating, and a support system of loved ones is so important for those going through cancer treatment."

Farrell said she and her colleagues were happy to resume in-person care for patients in the summer of 2020 after only a few months of virtual care, because

despite the PPE they are required to wear they can still connect with families in the room.

Farrell works with dozens of families every year, and some over long periods of time. She sees the many challenges families face but also their incredible resilience.

“It’s humbling and inspiring. Any advice I might impart has come from what these families have taught me over the years,” she said. “Take it one day at a time, maintain hope, and find small things to celebrate or be grateful for amidst the unthinkable.”

A pre-recorded interview with Farrell is available.