

From the Executive Editor

Morgan Morgan, MS, CCLS

Dear Colleagues,

As summer draws to a close, we find ourselves at a familiar and meaningful juncture—a season of transition that invites both reflection and renewal. The energy of summer programming begins to wind down, and the cadence of fall returns with fresh opportunities to re-engage in our work with focus and intention. For child life specialists, this time of year offers more than a seasonal shift; it's a chance to revisit the core of our mission and to recommit to practices that center the needs, voices, and lived experiences of children and families.

It is with great excitement and deep respect that I introduce Elana Brewer, MS, CCLS, as the new president of our association. Elana brings to this role decades of experience, steadfast leadership, and a deep commitment to the evolution of our profession. Her ability to bridge clinical excellence with visionary thinking makes her uniquely suited to lead us through this next chapter. Her thoughtful approach and steady leadership promise to guide our community with clarity and care.

This issue arrives on the heels of a memorable gathering of our community at ACLP conference this past May in Los Angeles. The conference was a powerful reminder of the strength and resilience of our field. Through rich workshops, thought-provoking panels, and heartfelt connection, we explored the complexities and possibilities of child life work in today's healthcare landscape. From sessions on integrative care to conversations around professional identity, our time in Los Angeles affirmed the importance of coming together to learn, share, and celebrate. The energy and insight from that event continue to ripple through the stories and contributions you'll find in this issue.

Among them is a compelling article that dives into the pediatric patient's perception of healthcare—a topic that sits at the heart of our work. Written by Ashley Semones, MA, CCLS and Kat Davitt, CCLS, OTR, this piece explores how children make sense of their medical experiences and provides a research-informed framework for understanding how developmental, emotional, and environmental factors shape those perceptions.

In this same spirit of deepening understanding, we are proud to feature an article that addresses the critical topic of creating a culture of respect and inclusion for individuals with autism. With increasing awareness and advocacy around neurodiversity in healthcare, this piece provides timely and actionable insights for creating environments where neurodivergent children can feel safe, supported, and empowered. Authors Briana Keller, MEd, Alexandra Kalinyak, BS, Malerie McDowell, BS, and Kelsey West, PhD share their own experiences working with and living as neurodivergent people and offer strategies for fostering effective communication and rethinking clinical interactions through a lens of dignity and individualized care. It is both a guide and a challenge—to grow as practitioners and as allies.

Also in this issue is a forward-thinking article introducing a novel framework for clinical internships. Born from a multi-institutional collaboration, this model reimagines how we train future child life specialists by placing greater emphasis on mentorship, reflective practice, and interprofessional learning. Authors Marne Perrin, MS, CCLS and Dagney Willey Adamson, MHI, CCLS share how they built a one-of-a-kind internship program to offer a clinical experience beyond the walls of the hospital. It's an inspiring look at how we can better prepare students for the realities—and rewards—of a career in child life.

Each of these articles, while distinct, share a common thread: a commitment to improving care through deeper understanding, innovation, and inclusivity. As we transition into the fall season, I hope this issue inspires you to think expansively about your role, your impact, and your continued growth as a professional. Whether you're supporting a young child through a first procedure, mentoring an intern, or developing new programming in your setting, your work matters—and it continues to shape the future of pediatric care in meaningful ways.

On behalf of the editorial team, thank you for your continued commitment to this field and for being part of such a vibrant, thoughtful, and passionate community. We are grateful to walk alongside you in this important work.

Warmly,
Morgan Morgan, MS, CCLS
Editor, Bulletin