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Anne Peat  
Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee  
Room T3.40  
Scottish Parliament  
EH99 1SP

7 November 2012

Dear Madam

PETITION PE1440

I refer to your letter of 8 December regarding Petition PE 1440 by Sharon McCluskie, on behalf of Play Scotland, on plans for the New Children and Young People Bill, and to the written questions.

The Scottish Government Health and Social Care Directorates believe that play has an important role in delivering care and supporting the whole wellbeing of children when being treated in the NHS and its hospitals throughout Scotland. The NHS employs Play Specialists and Play Assistants within Children's Hospitals. They are a recognised member of the paediatric multi-disciplinary team and provide the following services:

- teach the value of play for the sick child
- provide play to achieve developmental goals
- help children master and cope with anxieties and feelings
- contribute to clinical judgements through their play-based observations
- use play to prepare children for hospital procedures, support them through procedures and afterwards
- organise daily play and art activities in the playroom or at the bedside
- support families and siblings
- encourage peer group friendships to develop.

Play Specialists work in every ward and out-patient department (clinic) and are also available part-time within Accident and Emergency.

There is a professional register of hospital Play Specialists and although not a regulatory body the register seeks to promote the quality and professional status of the practising hospital Play Specialist.

In addition to Play Specialists there are a variety of other play activities for children and young people within wards and out-patient clinics e.g. Clown Doctors and Therapet.

In addition, Paediatric Allied Health Professionals use play within rehabilitation to ensure engagement of children and young people. This approach has been used for many years and improves adherence and engagement of the child and family. It also provides a way for families to continue with therapy outwith formal sessions. There is evidence that participation in activities that are enjoyable and that promote skill development, protects at-risk children and young people from developing mental health, academic and social problems. Occupational Therapists in particular focus on the development of skills for play to enable participation which in turn promotes development.

In addition, we are recommending that NHSScotland introduces a new health check at age 27-30 months from April 2013 to pick up a range of development issues and to be a key point for delivering health promotion messages, such as play opportunities and physical activity.

NHS Health Scotland also supports and encourages healthy play in Scotland. NHS Health Scotland recognises the wider relevance to early years and has continued to fund play@home within the play and health work-stream of the Healthy Living and Early Years Team.

#### play@home

play@home is a universal programme which guides parents on aspects of care and development to help give their child the best start in life, improving skills for parenting and supporting positive mental health.

play@home originated in New Zealand as 'KiwiBaby', a physical activity programme for children from birth to five years. It was introduced to parents in Scotland as play@home in 1999, initially in Fife and gradually to other parts of Scotland. In 2008 the Scottish Government committed to rolling the programme out across the whole of Scotland through the Healthy Eating, Active Living Action Plan (Scottish Government 2008).

The programme consists of three illustrated books, updated in 2012, which are issued by health visitors consecutively to parents at birth and age one and by local authority education staff at age three. In addition there are DVDs to support the Baby and Toddler stages. A "Training for Trainers" programme was developed using a multi-agency approach to improve local sustainability and programme accessibility. This has resulted in a network of trainers across Scotland from a variety of early years' agencies providing play@home training to the early years' workforce and awareness-raising sessions to parents and colleagues.

I hope this reassures you that NHSScotland recognises the importance of play in supporting the whole wellbeing of children.

Yours sincerely

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