

Welcome aboard-Empowering pediatric patients

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Pediatric dentistry generally has a wrong reputation as 'minor sub-specialization'. In reality though, it is the first encounter with an important part of healthcare, and wrong early treatment implants traumata and dental phobia in these young patients, often for life. Pediatric dentistry commonly struggles to overcome anxiety in young patients who do not yet fully comprehend and appreciate treatment. Comparing dental treatment with air travel where a similar set of anxieties applies (powerlessness, vulnerability, not being in control or informed well enough), author drew lessons from how airlines counter this anxiety. Relaxation ambience and patient involvement are keys to smooth procedures. Concepts are early-as-possible first encounters, information-based, non-authoritative approach, tools=toys, and other innovative ways to make kids feel safe at the office. A pediatric protocol is derived from our unique treatment philosophy. 3 basic psychological factors contribute to anxiety reduction: familiarity (with office & staff), empowerment, and office ambience. The 'playsafe' protocol governs the release of certain selected instruments/materials as toys, a list of key interactions inspires to empower and create rapport. Understanding anxiety psychology leads to greatly improved patient comfort, and the authors have built an entire office around their unconventional, child-centered concept. Evaluating the positive effects (relaxed, proud, more cooperative pediatric patients) of patient-involving pediatric dentistry, we strongly suggest its broader application, possibly beyond pediatric dentistry. A society that truly cares for young people's emotional well-being is less violent, more cooperative and empathic, and pediatric health care significantly contributes toward this greater goal.

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