

Behavioral management of ASD patients in the outpatient dental setting: A scoping review

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Background: In 2000, it was estimated that 1 in 150 children in the United States were diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) (CDC). In 2020, the estimated prevalence further rose to 1 in 36 children (Maenner, etal. 2020). The increasing number of autism diagnoses over the years can be attributed to several factors, including the broadening of diagnostic criteria as outlined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). Dental anxiety is one of the main problems dentists may face during the treatment of all pediatric dental patients. Moreover, neurodivergent patients require behavioral modifications to their visit as they are more affected by changes in environments, daily schedules and other routines often eliciting behavioral resistance and tantrums. (Friedlander etal. 2006). The aim of our study is to review what behavior modification techniques have been utilized to improve the cooperation of patients within the Autism Spectrum Disorder in obtaining radiographs and receiving treatment in the dental clinic.

Methods: This study was designed and conducted following the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) standards as outlined in the Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions. Sixteen articles were identified as appropriate for inclusion in the present review. Data extracted included a study's type of intervention, duration of intervention, study populations and number of subjects, aim of the study, methodology, outcome measures, results, and study limitations.

Results: In line with Arksey and O'Malley guidelines, a thematic content analysis approach was carried out to identify common and distinctive themes performed in dentistry to complete a dental exam and/or restorative treatment in the outpatient dental clinic of patients who have been diagnosed in the autism spectrum disorder (ASD.) Discovered themes were organized, discussed and theoretically classified by the authors to facilitate comparisons. Through a thematic analysis, we classified the papers into 3 categories based on the interventions used: Behavior Guidance, Technology and Environmental Modifications. All 3 categories seemed to be promising as behavioral strategies for ASD patients in completing at least a dental exam. However

Discussion: Our findings showed that not one, but two or more techniques utilized simultaneously have the most impact in improving behavior and reducing anxiety. Interdisciplinary care that involves Occupational Therapists, Child Life Specialists and Speech Language Pathologists who can help desensitize these patients prior to the dental appointment. Pre-visit questionnaires, to increase familiarity of the dentist with the patient has also suggested to be included as part of the comprehensive approach.

Biography : Maria Velasco DMD, MSED, MS is a Board-certified pediatric dentist at Nemours Children's Dental Health in Wilmington, Delaware. She serves as a faculty to the pediatric dental residency program and treats neurotypical patients and those with special needs and medically complexities in the outpatient dental clinic and in the Operating room.

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