

INTRODUCTION

Autism, also known as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), is a complex neurodevelopmental condition. According to the CDC in 2023, autism affects all populations and is currently 1 in 36 children are being diagnosed. This condition holds persistent challenges through a broad spectrum of different degrees varying between individuals with autism. An individual with autism may have challenges in social skills, communication (verbal or nonverbal), and behavioral difficulties (Mandar, 2021). In a dental operator, there are many stimuli which can be a challenge for a patient with autism. There are various ways that the dental hygienist can adapt their treatment and the environment in which it is delivered to suit patients' needs.



Questions

What is hypersensitivity versus hyposensitivity?

- Hypersensitivity is over responsiveness
- Hyposensitivity is under responsiveness

What accommodations can be made for these sensitivities in an operator?

- Hypersensitivity : calming lights, noise reduction through the use of headphones, private operator, caution of taste and texture
- Hyposensitivity : visual supports, gadgets for occupying the patient, frequent breaks, open space

What interruptions/triggers may be present in an operator that can cause behavioral changes?

- Loud apparatuses, crowds of workers and patients, bright lights, loud music

What sensitivities may a patient with autism have?

- Sights, sounds, smell, taste, touch, internal body cues (panic)

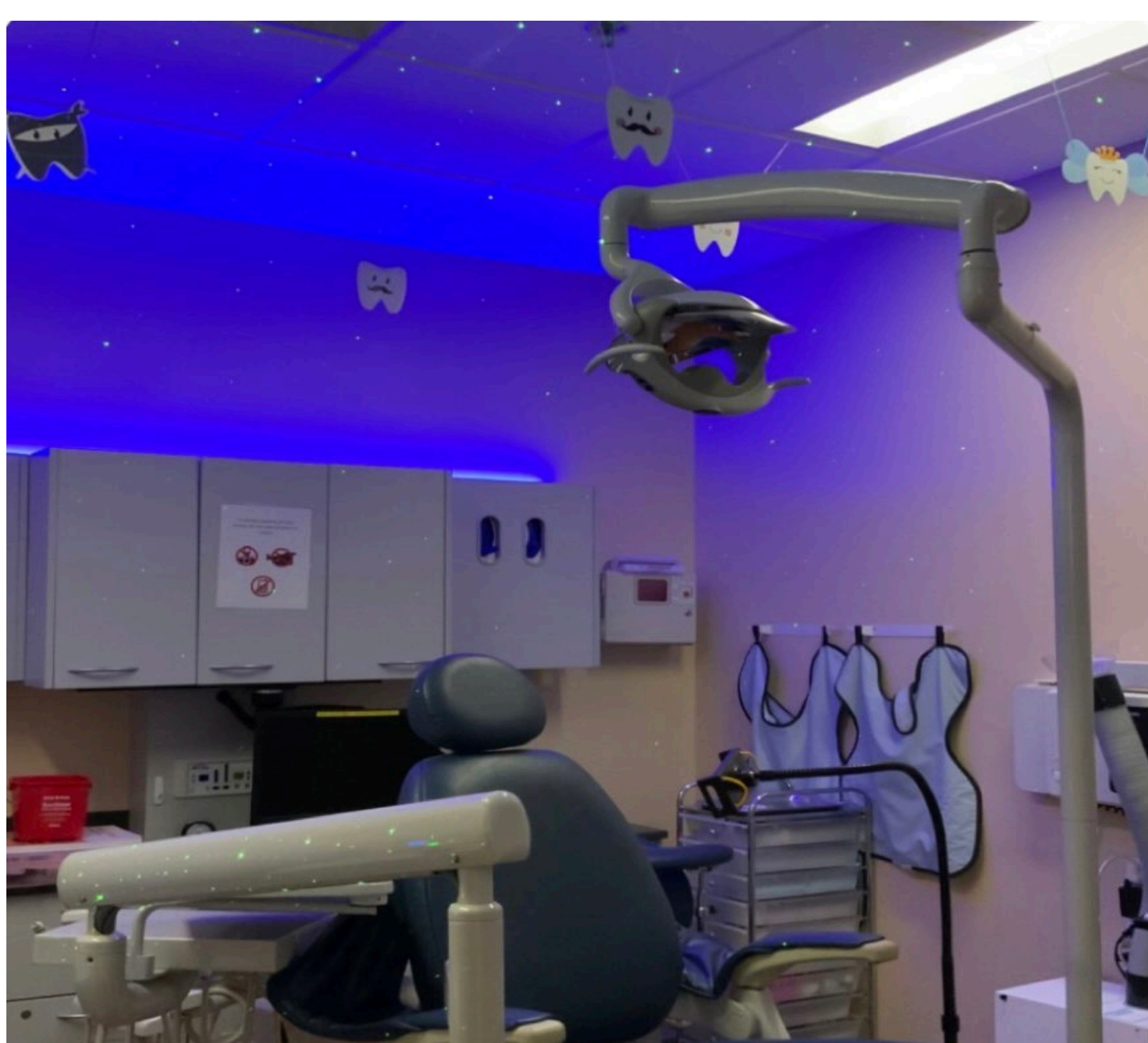
Changes in the Operator

-Lights : Soft, calm, adjustable lights that can be dimmed and/or change colors

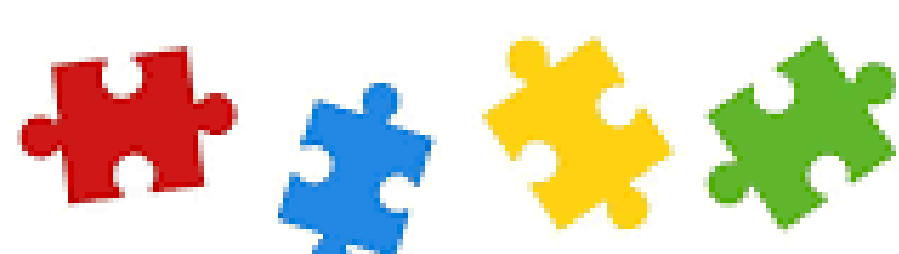
-Tastes: Flavorless/unscented/untextured products

-Operatories: Allow for privacy and personal space limiting noise and/or music

-PECS Board : Visual & explanation of visit



**AUTISM
SAME ROAD
SAME BRICKS
DIFFERENT VIEW**



Role of the Dental Hygienist

A hygienist is responsible for preventive treatment of a patient that presents with autism.

A hygienist should act calm, confident, and give reassurance, while also creating a safe and trusting environment. Giving positive reinforcement/immediate verbal praise after steps of treatment: "Good job opening up!", "Thank you for staying still!", "You're doing a great job listening!"

Utilize desensitization techniques/appointments

In most cases studied of behavior of a patient with autism and lights, children did not prefer harsh lights; ranging from too bright or too dark, flickering lights causing the patient to be agitated and uncomfortable; rather a hygienist should have a light that has functional settings to differentiate between each patient and their needs (Nair AS, 2022). Alter any products containing unpleasant smells or textures; smell of gloves, pastes, soaps around office, air fresheners, and restrain wearing perfumes worn by workers (Kuhaneck, H.M. & Chisholm, E.C. 2012).

Conclusion

The management of a patient with ASD in a dental setting requires knowledge and understanding of the spectrum of behavioral patterns and individual sensitivity triggers. Due to the varying degrees of ASD, it is imperative that the dental team focuses on various triggers and sensitivities based on the need of each individual. Cognizance of minimized lighting, noise, privacy, and tastes associated with the dental visit should be prioritized to create a comforting environment for patients with ASD. As shown through studies and articles expressed, there are many alterations of treating a patient that may present with a condition like ASD. As hygienists, we are there to accommodate and offer the best experience for them while providing dental care.

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