

# Identifying Best Practice for Healthcare Providers Caring for Autistic Children Perioperatively

Margaret Gettis, DNP, CPNP-PC; Katherine Wittling, BSN, RN, CAPA;  
Jessica Palumbo Dufur, BS, CCLS, CEIM; Ashley McClain, BS, CCLS

## PURPOSE

- Identify most effective strategies for healthcare providers managing surgical patients with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).
- Incorporate strategies into easily accessible care plans for all providers to give individualized treatment.

## PICO QUESTION:

- Nurse Researcher consulted by clinical staff for help searching best practice recommendations for healthcare workers caring for ASD children having outpatient procedures at a large urban pediatric healthcare organization.
- **Question posed:** In surgical patients with ASD, what are best practice healthcare provider strategies to decrease maladaptive behavior perioperatively?

## METHOD

- Literature Search conducted via PubMed and CINAHL, included psychological, nursing and anesthesia journals
- Majority of relevant evidence published from 2011-2016
- Key words: coping perioperative surgery, perioperative anxiety autistic children, autistic children and surgery
- Nurse Researcher in collaboration with clinical staff created Evidence Summary Table

## APPRAISAL OF EVIDENCE:

Effective strategies for healthcare providers fall broadly into three categories:

- 1. Medication Interventions-** Dexmedetomidine with/without midazolam effective with few side effects in ASD patients
- 2. Distraction/Play Therapy Interventions-** activities with Child Life, animal assisted therapy, personal comfort items and story boards
- 3. Management Interventions-** parental presence in PACU, preregistration to avoid noisy waiting area



## IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

- Parents contacted prior to surgery and effective strategies individualized according to patient and parental preference.
- Information incorporated into perioperative care plan housed in electronic medical record.
- Plan easily accessed by multiple disciplines involved in care of surgical patient.
- Plans can be updated quickly as patient needs, preferences change.

## CONCLUSIONS

- Collaborative effort results in use of effective strategies based on current evidence leading to:
  1. better communication
  2. individualized care
  3. positive patient surgical experience
- Care plans for ASD patients now being accessed by providers across healthcare organization for other stressful events such as ED visits or MRI procedures.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Over 500 Coping plans already in system, new plans created daily.
- When ASD patient chart accessed, a Best Practice Advisory alerts healthcare provider to presence of Coping Plan.
- Plans underway to link Coping Plans to longitudinal Care Plans.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- The Clinical Staff of the Egleston campus Day Surgery Unit as well as the Marcus Autism Center are gratefully acknowledged.
- Contact [margaret.gettis@choa.org](mailto:margaret.gettis@choa.org) for more information
- Photo used with permission
- References available