

# VISUAL COMMUNICATION IN HOSPITAL



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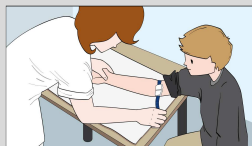
**Introduction.** Compared to general population, people with a developmental disability are characterized by worse physical health and subject to a much shorter life expectancy (Lawrence et al., 2013). This data is typically linked to the so called «refusal of treatment», or to the exceptionally high cost in terms of time, stress and organisation with regard to prevention measures carried out on uncooperative patients. The reception of people with an autism spectrum condition in hospitals, in many cases constitutes a problem for both the patient, because treatment protocols are often inadequate to his needs, and the medical and nursing staff, who may face with bizarre behaviour and unexpected reactions. (Nicholas et al., 2016) Considering health care needs of people with ASD and the lack of information and training on ASD of health care professionals, we designed and tested a communication interface intended for the interaction between people on the autism spectrum and the medical and nursing staff.

## What about the reception of people with an autism spectrum condition in hospital?

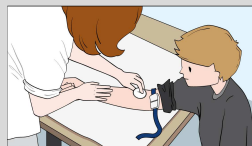
Analysis of difficulties	Research of strategies
<p><b>Lack of social and psychological intuition</b></p> <p>« I do not know what it will happen »</p> <p>« I do not know what I have to do »</p> <p>« I do not know what you are going to do »</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ To explain to the patient what will happen during the medical examination by visual language (pictures, videos)</li> <li>✓ To explain to the patient what he is expected to do during the medical examination by visual supports</li> <li>✓ To train the patient to be visited simulating the medical examination step by step</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sensory issues</b></p> <p>« This hurts me »</p> <p>« I do not tolerate that noise »</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ To use the step by step procedure to identify the sensory elements the person cannot tolerate</li> <li>✓ To train the person in order to better tolerate the unpleasant stimuli</li> <li>✓ To find out different ways to carry out the medical procedure avoiding the sensory issue</li> <li>✓ To inform the medical staff about the patient's sensory issue</li> </ul>
<p><b>Language and communication impairments:</b></p> <p>I cannot ask:</p> <p>« What is going to happen? »</p> <p>« What do I have to do? »</p> <p>« What are you going to do? »</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ To make videos which illustrate accurately the medical examination</li> <li>✓ To use videos which answer visually to these not expressed questions</li> <li>✓ To separate the whole procedure in steps which highlight the most important phases of the examination</li> </ul>
<p><b>Unexpected events</b></p> <p>« I do not like unexpected events »</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ To make the medical procedure known in order to remove (or reduce) the unforeseeable</li> <li>✓ To create a step by step procedure of the medical procedure in order to make the visit predictable</li> <li>✓ To follow the step by step accurately during the visit in order to make the patient secure</li> </ul>



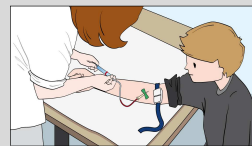
I roll up my sleeve and stretch out my arm.



The nurse put a tight band on my arm.



The nurse wipes my arm.



The nurse puts the needle in my arm and draws blood.



The nurse take the needle out and puts a plaster on my arm.

**The training phase.** The communication interface was tested using it to prepare a group of children on the autism spectrum to have a blood test. The application showed step by step the way the blood test would be carried out, while simulates of each procedural step were fulfilled. Specific training was also done in order to desensitize the subject to specific sensory stimuli, if necessary. The application was then used by nursing staff when children went to the hospital for the blood test. **In the hospital** the step by step procedure was used during the blood test in order to

facilitate the communication between the nurse and the child. The parents of the child intervened, when necessary, in order to help the nurse in understanding the child. Each child was collaborative and each nurse was able to do the blood test. **Conclusions.** Facilitating communication between medical and nursing staff and their patients on the autism spectrum is crucial in order to assure the best quality of health care to people on the spectrum.

### References

Lawrence D, Hancock K.J., Kisely S. (2013). The gap in life expectancy from preventable physical illness in psychiatric patients in Western Australia: retrospective analysis of population based registers  
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