

**BASCD 2023 ABSTRACT #11****Overcoming sensory barriers to facilitate dental treatment in patients with special needs**

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**Background:**

Around 1.5 million people in the UK have learning disabilities and are more likely to have poorer oral health. They can suffer from sensory processing disorders or dental anxiety, making accepting dental treatment more challenging. The Special Care Dentistry (SCD) department at the Royal London Dental Hospital provides care to patients with disabilities including vast sensory needs. Presently, the department does not contain any sensory aides to facilitate treatment.

**Objectives:**

To identify sensory barriers to providing dental treatment for patients. To develop a carer and staff guided proposal for equipment selection to aid in overcoming identified sensory barriers.

**Methods:**

Qualitative data were collected via de novo non-piloted questionnaires delivered over the telephone to seven carers of patients treated in the SCD department and ten members of SCD staff. Questions included patient demographics, diagnoses, experiences of whether the current dental environment hindered or aided treatment, and opinions on using sensory equipment in a dental environment. The outcomes were used to inform the design of a grant proposal to obtain the recommended sensory equipment. This project did not require ethical approval as it was a quality improvement project and was registered with Barts Health Trust.

**Results:**

Patients were aged 16-55 years and diagnoses included autism, learning disabilities and dental phobia. Reported environmental barriers included unfamiliar settings, loud sounds, bright lights and associations with previous negative hospital experience. Recommended facilitators included music, sensory toys, and ambient lighting, with the former being most frequently reported. These recommendations were used to propose an interactive projector for the waiting area, ambient ceiling projections for the clinic, weighted blankets, and a speaker.

**Conclusion:**

This project has highlighted the perceived sensory barriers to providing treatment to patients with special needs. The addition of sensory equipment may facilitate treatment and make it more accessible, contributing to reducing the oral health inequalities of this population.

**Sources of funding:**

A grant from Barts Charity has been awarded to support the introduction of sensory equipment into the special care and sedation dentistry department.

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