



INSIDE PEDIATRICS

Sensory Pathway to expand to One Day Surgery

A patient awaits treatment in Children's of Alabama's emergency department, anxiously rocking back and forth. Such behavior could be written off as fear of the doctor, but to Child Life Specialist Chelsea Brashier and other emergency staff, it's often a clue to pinpoint the best method of care.

Brashier aided in the November 2016 launch of a pilot project to reduce stress for children with autism and other sensory sensitivities when they visit the emergency department. Children's Sensory Pathway removes the barriers to diagnosis and trains staff on how best to care for patients with sensory sensitivities like Down syndrome and autism.

Upon observing the patient, Brashier asked the patient's parent to complete a brief questionnaire that determines sensory sensitivity. Once the patient is identified as sensory sensitive, a sensory friendly pathway for care is established. Patients on the pathway have access to kits that contain fidget toys, weighted lap pads and noise canceling headphones – items that sooth and comfort the patient.



"After going through the pathway, the patient who was rocking back and forth is now calm, laying down with his blanket and watching a movie," Brashier said. "And the parent said, "This is the calmest he's been this whole time. This is amazing."

Brashier added, "Every patient is different, but we have a starting point and we can individualize a plan. It's been great to see the difference in our patients and patient families, and help a population that views the world differently."

Michele Kong, M.D., who also helped launch the Sensory Pathway, said the emergency department can be overwhelming to patients with sensory sensitivities, citing loud noises and bright lights. Now that a pathway to care has been tested and proven successful, what was once a highly stressful experience for patient and parent is considerably less so.

"The idea with the Sensory Pathway is for us as providers to be more preventive rather than reactive to some of the additional challenges that these children may face in the emergency department," Kong said. "This is a huge opportunity for us to be pioneers in this space."

The next step is expanding the Sensory Pathway to Benjamin Russell One Day Surgery, which specializes in preparing patients and their families for common surgical services. Children's staff who will treat those on the pathway began training in June.

"The core goals of this rollout will be the same along with a few anticipated differences," Kong said. "For instance, unlike the emergency department where patients are unexpected, One Day surgery allows for more preparation time. We will be able to know who is coming, when they are coming and the individual's unique challenges, therefore allowing us to prepare for the visit.

"We aim to roll out the Sensory Pathway to Benjamin Russell One Day surgery at the end of summer into the beginning of fall," Kong said. "Our goal is to ultimately expand the initiative system-wide to the rest of Children's of Alabama."