PATIENT PERSONAS

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Persona 1: Maya
- **Age:** 22
- **Location:** Urban area, Portland, Oregon
- **Education Level:** Community college student studying graphic design
- **Challenges:**
  - o Struggles with verbal communication, especially under stress
  - o Dislikes eye contact and sudden physical contact
  - o Strong sensory sensitivities to fluorescent lights, crowded spaces, and noise
- **Healthcare Scenario:** Routine check-up and vaccination
- **Needs:**
  - o Clear, literal language with step-by-step explanations
  - o Visual aids or written summaries of procedures
  - o Predictability in appointments (timing, who they'll see, what will happen)
- **Attitude:** Intelligent and self-aware, but anxious in medical environments due to past experiences of being misunderstood or rushed
- **Note:** Prefers texting over calls to communicate with providers

Persona 2: Leo
- **Age:** 16
- **Location:** Austin, Texas
- **Education Level:** High school, mainstream classes with support
- **Challenges:**
  - o High-functioning autism; socially anxious and literal in communication
  - o Avoids eye contact; becomes frustrated when not understood
- **Healthcare Scenario:** Mental health evaluation for anxiety
- **Needs:**
  - o Clear boundaries and transparency in questions
  - o Avoid metaphorical or abstract questions (e.g., "How do you feel inside?")
  - o Needs processing time before responding
- **Attitude:** Very bright and logical; skeptical of medical professionals based on prior experiences
- **Note:** Builds trust slowly; tends to mask discomfort in appointments

Persona 3: Amina
- **Age:** 28
- **Location:** Minneapolis, Minnesota

- **Education Level:** Master's in Library Science
- **Challenges:**
    - o Sensory sensitivity to smells (e.g., disinfectants) and tactile stimuli
    - o Difficulty regulating tone of voice and facial expressions
    - o Difficulty filtering background noise, which can affect comprehension
- **Healthcare Scenario:** OB-GYN visit for prenatal care
- **Needs:**
    - o Advanced notice of procedures and physical touch
    - o Dimmed lighting and minimal background conversation
    - o Extra time to communicate and ask questions
- **Attitude:** Organized and well-prepared; values autonomy and control over care
- **Note:** Brings printed notes and typed questions to every appointment

Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD)

Persona 1: Jonah
- **Age:** 8
- **Location:** Suburban New Jersey
- **Education Level:** Elementary school student
- **Challenges:**
    - o Overwhelmed by bright lights, loud noises, and certain textures
    - o May have meltdowns when overstimulated
    - o Finds waiting rooms distressing due to sensory overload
- **Healthcare Scenario:** Emergency room visit after a playground fall
- **Needs:**
    - o A quiet space to wait
    - o Gentle tone of voice and slow, calm movements from providers
    - o Option to be examined while sitting on caregiver's lap
- **Attitude:** Generally cheerful and curious but may become distressed quickly if overwhelmed
- **Note:** Carries noise-canceling headphones and a weighted toy for comfort

Persona 2: Ella
- **Age:** 4
- **Location:** Denver, Colorado
- **Education Level:** Preschool
- **Challenges:**
    - o Severe tactile defensiveness (dislikes being touched unexpectedly)
    - o Meltdowns triggered by strong smells, medical equipment sounds

- **Healthcare Scenario:** Pediatric vaccination appointment
- **Needs:**
    o Familiar toy and a visual countdown of what will happen
    o Gentle, slow-paced interaction with parental involvement
    o Calming environment with limited noise and soft lighting
- **Attitude:** Loving and expressive in safe environments; easily overwhelmed in unfamiliar ones
- **Note:** Uses picture cards to communicate choices and feelings

Persona 3: Tyrone
- **Age:** 33
- **Location:** Chicago, Illinois
- **Education Level:** College dropout due to chronic anxiety and SPD
- **Challenges:**
    o Auditory hypersensitivity; wears earplugs in most environments
    o Distracted or irritated by scratchy gowns, bright lights, and electronic beeping
- **Healthcare Scenario:** Check-up related to chronic fatigue
- **Needs:**
    o Option to remain in street clothes
    o Pre-visit sensory plan (e.g., requesting low-stimulus room)
    o Provider acknowledgment of sensory accommodations without judgment
- **Attitude:** Cooperative if accommodated; otherwise guarded and distrustful
- **Note:** Self-advocates well, but has a history of being dismissed as "difficult"

Cerebral Palsy

Persona 1: Linda (Nonverbal Communication)
- **Age:** 34
- **Location:** Rural Kentucky
- **Education Level:** Bachelor's degree in social work (attained with accommodations)
- **Challenges:**
    o Uses a power wheelchair
    o Communicates using an eye-gaze communication device
    o Often experiences provider assumptions that she has cognitive impairments
- **Healthcare Scenario:** Follow-up for chronic hip pain
- **Needs:**
    o Time and patience for communication through her device
    o Examination table with wheelchair accessibility
    o Respectful communication addressed directly to her, not her caregiver

- **Attitude:** Confident and assertive; expects to be included in her care
- **Note:** Active disability rights advocate with a strong online presence

Persona 2: Jordan
- **Age:** 12
- **Location:** Atlanta, Georgia
- **Education Level:** Middle school, mainstream with IEP
- **Challenges:**
    - Spastic diplegia CP; uses walker
    - Struggles with fine motor skills and fatigue during long appointments
- **Healthcare Scenario:** Orthopedic follow-up for leg bracing
- **Needs:**
    - Accessible seating and bathrooms
    - Extra time for mobility transitions
    - Direct conversation from providers, not just caregivers
- **Attitude:** Outgoing and funny; likes to be treated with maturity
- **Note:** Often overlooked or talked over by medical staff

Persona 3: Priya
- **Age:** 50
- **Location:** Queens, New York
- **Education Level:** Vocational training in office support
- **Challenges:**
    - CP with hemiparesis; ambulates independently but with visible difficulty
    - Experiences fatigue and pain, especially during winter
- **Healthcare Scenario:** Preventive care screening (mammogram, blood pressure)
- **Needs:**
    - Judgment-free conversations about mobility and aging
    - Help navigating small exam rooms with limited support handles
    - Reassurance and support when adapting standard procedures
- **Attitude:** Practical and matter-of-fact; sometimes frustrated by assumptions about her capabilities
- **Note:** Strong community ties and proactive about her health

Intellectual Disabilities (ID)

Persona 1: Marcus
- **Age:** 45
- **Location:** Inner-city Detroit
- **Education Level:** Attended special education programs; limited literacy

- **Challenges:**
  - o Needs simple, concrete language and repetition
  - o Has difficulty following complex instructions or unfamiliar routines
  - o Anxious in unfamiliar settings
- **Healthcare Scenario:** Annual physical and bloodwork
- **Needs:**
  - o Familiar caregiver present during appointments
  - o Visual cues or pictograms to support understanding
  - o Encouragement and reassurance throughout the process
- **Attitude:** Friendly and cooperative when he feels safe; withdrawn or fearful if rushed
- **Note:** Enjoys routine and gets nervous when appointments run late

Persona 2: Carla
- **Age:** 26
- **Location:** Fresno, California
- **Education Level:** High school diploma with life-skills program
- **Challenges:**
  - o Mild ID; needs repetition and visual instructions
  - o Easily confused by long explanations or medical jargon
- **Healthcare Scenario:** Annual gynecological check-up
- **Needs:**
  - o Use of diagrams and plain language
  - o Option to bring a support person to help understand follow-up care
  - o Clear explanation of consent, boundaries, and next steps
- **Attitude:** Very eager to please; may say "yes" without understanding
- **Note:** Has been taken advantage of in the past due to compliance behavior

Persona 3: Dennis
- **Age:** 60
- **Location:** Boston, Massachusetts
- **Education Level:** Attended special education; works part-time at a grocery store
- **Challenges:**
  - o Moderate ID with early-stage dementia
  - o Becomes disoriented with changes in routine
  - o Needs help with personal care and transportation
- **Healthcare Scenario:** Follow-up for diabetes management
- **Needs:**
  - o Familiar provider or staff member whenever possible
  - o Routine-based care (same room, same time, same phrasing)
  - o Coordination with caregiver to ensure medication compliance

- **Attitude:** Trusting and polite; confused easily by rushed or changing plans
- **Note:** Enjoys social interaction and familiar faces

CLINICIAN PERSONAS

1. Nurse Practitioner (NP) – Sophia Ramirez
- **Age:** 38
- **Location:** Los Angeles, CA
- **Workplace:** Urban community clinic
- **Specialty:** Family medicine
- **Years in Practice:** 12
- **Experience with Neurodiverse Patients:** Moderate; often works with Medicaid patients including neurodiverse children
- **Strengths:** Empathetic and culturally sensitive
- **Challenges:** Limited formal training on sensory processing issues and communication tools for nonverbal patients
- **Attitude Toward VR Training:** Curious and open, wants to improve patient rapport and comfort
- **Training Needs:** Practical communication strategies, navigating patient meltdowns, modifying exam environments

2. Medical Assistant (MA) – Jamal Brooks
- **Age:** 25
- **Location:** Cleveland, OH
- **Workplace:** Large outpatient pediatric clinic
- **Specialty:** Pediatrics
- **Years in Practice:** 3
- **Experience with Neurodiverse Patients:** Low; has assisted in a few ASD-related appointments but often unsure how to help
- **Strengths:** Friendly and patient, good with kids
- **Challenges:** Struggles with identifying early signs of distress or overstimulation
- **Attitude Toward VR Training:** Eager to learn but nervous about complex cases
- **Training Needs:** Sensory-friendly techniques during vitals, preparing the room for diverse needs, caregiver communication

3. Primary Care Physician (MD) – Dr. Ethan Chen
- **Age:** 50
- **Location:** St. Louis, MO
- **Workplace:** Private family practice
- **Specialty:** General adult and geriatric medicine

- **Years in Practice:** 24
- **Experience with Neurodiverse Patients:** Minimal; mostly treats older adults
- **Strengths:** Experienced diagnostician, efficient under pressure
- **Challenges:** Occasionally dismisses patient concerns due to cognitive or communication barriers
- **Attitude Toward VR Training:** Skeptical at first, but recognizes gaps in knowledge and wants to provide better care
- **Training Needs:** Bias recognition, patient-centered communication for ID patients, adjustments for aging neurodiverse adults

4. Emergency Room RN – Kendra Williams
- **Age:** 31
- **Location:** Houston, TX
- **Workplace:** Level 1 Trauma Center
- **Specialty:** Emergency and acute care
- **Years in Practice:** 7
- **Experience with Neurodiverse Patients:** Frequent but chaotic; sees patients with autism and SPD in crisis situations
- **Strengths:** Fast-thinking, trauma-informed
- **Challenges:** Managing overstimulation in a high-stress, noisy environment
- **Attitude Toward VR Training:** Strongly supportive — believes empathy and real-time training could improve patient safety
- **Training Needs:** De-escalation techniques, sensory-safe ER setup, triage prioritization for neurodiverse populations

5. Physician Assistant (PA) – Alex Novak
- **Age:** 29
- **Location:** Seattle, WA
- **Workplace:** Urban outpatient neurology clinic
- **Specialty:** Neurology & developmental disabilities
- **Years in Practice:** 5
- **Experience with Neurodiverse Patients:** High; works with children and young adults regularly
- **Strengths:** Strong understanding of developmental pathways and comorbidities
- **Challenges:** Less confident in non-verbal communication; struggles with time constraints when explanations take longer
- **Attitude Toward VR Training:** Enthusiastic and sees VR as a chance to refine communication and leadership in care
- **Training Needs:** Practice pacing appointments, non-verbal interaction modeling, setting expectations clearly for patients and caregivers

USER STORIES (PATIENTS)

Maya (Autism)
As a young adult with autism,
I want healthcare staff to give me written and visual explanations of what will happen during my appointment,
So that I can reduce anxiety, understand what's going on, and feel more in control of my care.

Jonah (SPD)
As a child with sensory processing disorder,
I want to be seen in a quiet, calming room and avoid bright lights and loud noises,
So that I don't become overwhelmed or have a meltdown during my ER visit.

Linda (Cerebral Palsy)
As a nonverbal adult with cerebral palsy,
I want providers to speak directly to me and give me time to respond with my communication device,
So that I feel respected and included in decisions about my own health.

Carla (Intellectual Disability)
As a young woman with an intellectual disability,
I want doctors to use pictures and clear words when explaining my exam,
So that I understand what's happening and can give informed consent.

USER STORIES (CLINICIANS)

Sophia Ramirez (NP)
As a nurse practitioner in a community clinic,
I want realistic VR simulations that show how to communicate with neurodiverse patients during physical exams,
So that I can avoid misunderstandings and make my patients feel safe and heard.

Dr. Ethan Chen (MD)
As a seasoned primary care physician,
I want training that helps me recognize and reduce bias when interacting with patients who have intellectual disabilities,
So that I can ensure I'm not overlooking important symptoms or misinterpreting behavior.

Kendra Williams (ER RN)
As an ER nurse,
I want to practice de-escalation techniques in a simulated, high-stress hospital setting,
So that I can respond more calmly and effectively to neurodiverse patients in crisis without escalating their distress.

Alex Novak (PA)
As a physician assistant working in neurology,
I want to improve my non-verbal communication and pacing with non-speaking patients,
So that I can deliver care that is inclusive and empowering even under time constraints.