

[Zeph] Hi, this is Zeph again from the UVM Autism Collaborative, and today I'm here to talk with you about study number four, the Center for Autism within a primary care practice, or CAST.

So what is the CAST clinic?

It's a healthcare program for Autistic adolescents and adults at the Wexner Medical Center at the Ohio State University. It's part of a larger primary care clinic with a medical home model. It serves 858 Autistics in the large city of Columbus, Ohio.

About the first study.

This first study included a focus group of 10 Autistics, adults, age 18 to 30. These adults did not have learning disabilities. The study also

looked at how the medical visits went for 74 patients.

About the study.

The focus was on what makes it hard to receive medical care. They also talked about how to make the care more accessible.

Problems identified:

- Sensitive to sound, light, and touch.
- Anxiety being in the waiting room.
- Stress about talking with the physician and the medical team.
- Stress around the physical exam.

Possible solutions:

- Offer some control over the environment, such as earphones, lighting, et cetera.
- Have things to do while waiting, and
- Provide options for how to communicate with the provider.

Components of the CAST clinic:

- Patients get a phone call before each visit to go over goals and needs.
- The visit is modified to meet the person's needs.

Evaluation of the program.

112 autistics age 15 to 45 received a pre-visit phone call. The study looked at the visits for 74 of these patients.

Evaluation of the program.

23%, or 17 of the 74 autistic patients needed to modify the healthcare visit. Those who needed the changes also had other conditions, such as seizures, intellectual disability, or a history of aggressive behavior.

Needs and barriers.

The needs and barriers for these 17 patients were:

- Difficulty waiting, reported by 12,
- Noises, reported by 11, and
- Bright lights, reported by two,
- Fear of needles, reported by six,
- Difficulty being touched, reported by six,
- A history of aggressive behavior in a medical office, reported by three, and
- Difficulty in taking vital signs, reported by one.

The individual plan for the first visit included:

- No waiting room and registration done in the exam room. This was for 16 patients.
- Waiting to take vital signs for two patients.
- Warning them before touching them, reported by two patients.
- Waiting in the car until the provider is ready for two patients.
- Keeping the lights off for one patient, and
- Being the first appointment of the day for one patient.

Outcomes.

Of the 17 patients with changes to their medical visits, five could not complete the vital signs. Two could not complete another part of the exam.

About the second study.

Changes to the CAST clinic over time included videos for patients and providers about common procedures, such as taking blood pressures and blood draws. Changes to the CAST clinic also included happy visits. Happy visits are short, non-medical visits with a nurse or a medical assistant. The goal is to increase patient comfort and decrease patient stress.

Other changes to the CAST clinic included that patients can attend trainings at night, and they made visits longer and offered telehealth visits, 60 minutes for the initial visit, 40 minutes for the follow up visit, and then back to 20 minutes with the expertise.

So how is the CAST clinic funded?

It's funded by private donations and grants that help pay for staff, more time for healthcare providers, a nurse care coordinator, a social worker, a program director. Funding the extra services is a challenge.

Outcomes.

These things help the Autistics transition to adult primary care: Phone calls before visits, and longer first appointment times.

Next steps.

You're all done with this module. Go ahead and use the link in the email to confirm that you're done with this module.

References. Saqr et al., published in 2017,

"Addressing medical needs of adolescents and adults with autism spectrum disorders in a primary care setting," published in "Autism," and Hart, 2022, "Implementation and Evolution of a Primary Care-Based Program for Adolescents and Young Adults on the Autism Spectrum."