



Say Less Show More: Visuals improving health care delivery

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Children and adults with intellectual disability (ID) and other developmental disabilities (DD) experience significant barriers to accessing the healthcare system, yet have higher rates of many treatable health conditions compared to the mainstream population (Williams, et al., 2005; Ackland & Wade, 1995). The health disparities continue through the lifespan with adults with ID experiencing premature mortality and over-representation of potentially avoidable deaths (Trollor, Srasuebku, & Howlett, 2017). There are many factors contributing to this, with a key issue being communication barriers between patients and health professionals.

Augmentative and alternative communication strategies (AAC) are widely used outside healthcare settings to assist communication with children with ID/DD. Parents of children with ID/DD recognise that their child often finds it difficult to know what is expected in healthcare, and that visuals would make it easier for their child to *share "a story" with his/ her nurse or doctor.*

Say Less Show More visuals were developed in response to the limited resources and skills in supporting children with disabilities in healthcare. They also acknowledge the growing expectations that all children will be supported to access mainstream services in line with the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

Intersectoral partnerships critical to project success

At the outset of this project, creating and sustaining effective and relevant partnerships across professionals and agencies has not only brought together a relevant mix of skills and expertise for this project, but it has also demonstrated a genuine and shared responsibility for improving health services for children and young people with disabilities. Parents of children with disabilities have also provided valuable guidance and feedback for each stage of this project. Key members of the team have included professionals from: the Disability Specialist Unit and Emergency Department (ED) from the Children's Hospital at Westmead; Agency for Clinical Innovation - Intellectual



Figure 1: SLSM team wins Judges Choice Award at SCHN for Implementing Evidence Based Practice

Disability Network; Lifestart Early Childhood Intervention and School Age Services; and, Ageing, Disability and Homecare (NSW Family and Community Services). Members of the team can be seen in Figure 1.

Introduction of Visuals to a Paediatric Emergency Department

Three sets of visuals were developed and included: Taking blood/putting in a cannula, physical examination, and seeing the dentist. The visuals were introduced to a paediatric emergency department following staff training that was undertaken by a clinician who had been specifically trained by a specialised speech pathologist. This training involved exposure to visual use in the community sector and instruction from the speech pathologist. The clinician trainers were supported by a PowerPoint presentation that provided background information about communication difficulties for children with ID/DD, and the role of AAC. Training utilised coaching, positive reinforcement and other strategies to encourage staff to use the visuals in clinical practice in the ED.

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Evaluation of both the training and impact of visuals was undertaken. The training was found to be beneficial. A staff member noted that the training, *“Makes you more aware of the needs of children with disabilities & how we can help them with their hospitalisation experience”*. It was also noted that after even a short training session, staff felt a reasonably high degree of confidence in using the visuals. Staff found the visuals to be easy to use and often quite helpful, as one staff member said, *“I was sceptical of the benefit of this tool; we cannulated a child presenting with behavioural issues who was stressed about procedure; the tool completely calmed the child”*. Another staff member commented, *“Tool used effectively for mental health patient who was refusing procedure and then agreed to procedure after tool”*. Carers also reported that the visuals were appealing and welcome, with one carer saying, *“Thank you for helping make him understand the process. Very happy!”*.



Figure 2: SLSM elearning module is part of the SLSM online resources

Say Less Show More: Accessible tools for health professionals

Say Less Show More visuals are likely to be of benefit in all health care settings such as primary care. A suite of resources are now available online at: <https://www.aci.health.nsw.gov.au/resources/intellectual-disability/childrens-services/say-less-show-more>.

These resources include a training module, the three sets of visuals, and tip sheets for health professionals who wish to individualise or personalise the visuals for their own contexts (Figure 2).

Improving healthcare: Time for change

Given the persisting health disparities, the ongoing difficulties that children experience when they see a health professional, and the justified expectations that children with ID/DD will receive high quality healthcare, it is time for health services to provide the necessary resources and ensure health professionals are trained. Improving communication between clinicians and children with ID/DD would address one of the widely recognised barriers to good healthcare and increase inclusion in mainstream healthcare.

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References

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Tips to develop your own visuals

Say Less Show More

https://www.aci.health.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0016/323224/SLSM-Tips-develop-your-own.pdf

It's easier than you think to develop your own visuals. Here are some simple tips to make visuals for use with your patients. Remember when using visuals it's important to involve both the child and their carer:

- Use a mobile device, e.g. smart phone or tablet with a camera to take photos of each step of a common routine or procedure. Share these pictures by scrolling through them to show what will happen step by step.
- Use the internet to search for images of unfamiliar places e.g. hospitals or procedures.
- Show the pictures and talk about what they can expect to happen.
- Use a notepad and pen to draw some simple pictures and talk about what may happen.
- Some children may be able to read simple words or sentences.

Use computer programs such as Microsoft PowerPoint or Word to cut and paste photos into a story.

Some programs and applications that help you make visuals

There are several applications that can be used to create and share visuals on a smart phone or tablet device. Many applications will allow you to print the story to share.

- Special Stories (iPad and Android devices) specialiapps.org/en-gb/special-stories.html
- I Get... Going to the Hospital (iPhone and iPad only) igetitapps.com/app/i-get-going-to-the-hospital
- Social Stories (iPhone and iPad only) pufferfishapps.com

Some websites that have visuals to download and use

- Taking the Work out of Blood Work. A guide to blood draws for children with ASD kvc.mc.vanderbilt.edu/asdbloodwork/
- Widgit Health. A range for resources to support communication in healthcare. www.widgit-health.com

