From Dr. Escudé...

Improving Compliance with Healthcare Procedures in people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD)

Many of us have anxiety associated with medical or dental visits and procedures. The same is true for people with IDD. Efforts to relieve this anxiety and fear can go a long way to helping people get the healthcare they need. Desensitization techniques can help improve compliance and enhance adherence to treatment.

The first step is identifying what is causing the anxiety. Each person is unique. One may be fearing a needle, another may have trouble with eye drops, and someone else with a dental drill. Once we understand the cause, a step by step approach can be taken to help alleviate the fear. A first goal in a person who needs to have eye drops placed to prevent infection after a cataract surgery might be that the person allows for someone to simply put their hand close to their eye. Next, maybe allowing an eye dropper bottle close to their eye, then allowing for a drop to fall on their cheek and ultimately into their eye. Taking a minute to create a desensitization approach is worth the time. A psychologist or applied behavior analyst can help in creating the plan.

Other techniques that can help are to:
- Explain what’s being done in simple language
- Demonstrate what is going to happen
- Modeling the behavior by a peer
- Creating a relaxing environment
- Be patient with the procedure allowing for breaks
- Giving praise for completing a step
- Allowing for choices to be made by the person
- Breaking up a longer procedure into shorter steps
- Scheduling “pre-visits” to the office to meet staff, to sit on the exam table or dental chair and to use other desensitizing techniques

Thanks for taking the time to help the people we support receive the healthcare they need.
Dr. Escudé has dedicated his career to providing healthcare for people with IDD and other vulnerable populations and teaches on the subject throughout the country.