

Quality in Healthcare: An Autism-Friendly Hospital Emergency Waiting Room

Authors : Elena Bellini, Daniele Mugnaini, Michele Boschetto

Abstract : People with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder and an Intellectual Disability who need to attend a Hospital Emergency Waiting Room frequently present high levels of discomfort and challenging behaviors due to stress-related hyperarousal, sensory sensitivity, novelty-anxiety, communication and self-regulation difficulties. Increased agitation and acting out also disturb the diagnostic and therapeutic processes, and the emergency room climate. Architectural design disciplines aimed at reducing distress in hospitals or creating autism-friendly environments are called for to find effective answers to this particular need. A growing number of researchers are considering the physical environment as an important point of intervention for people with autism. It has been shown that providing the right setting can help enhance confidence and self-esteem and can have a profound impact on their health and wellbeing. Environmental psychology has evaluated the perceived quality of care, looking at the design of hospital rooms, paths and circulation, waiting rooms, services and devices. Furthermore, many studies have investigated the influence of the hospital environment on patients, in terms of stress-reduction and therapeutic intervention' speed, but also on health professionals and their work. Several services around the world are organizing autism-friendly hospital environments which involve the architecture and the specific staff training. In Italy, the association Spes contra spem has promoted and published, in 2013, the 'Chart of disabled people in the hospital'. It stipulates that disabled people should have equal rights to accessible and high-quality care. There are a few Italian examples of therapeutic programmes for autistic people as the Dama project in Milan and the recent experience of Children and Autism Foundation in Pordenone. Careggi's Emergency Waiting Room in Florence has been built to satisfy this challenge. This project of research comes from a collaboration between the technical staff of Careggi Hospital, the Center for autism PAMAPI and some architects expert in the sensory environment. The methodology of focus group involved architects, psychologists and professionals through a transdisciplinary research, centered on the links between the spatial characteristics and clinical state of people with ASD. The relationship between architectural space and quality of life is studied to pay maximum attention to users' needs and to support the medical staff in their work by a specific program of training. The result of this research is a sum of criteria used to design the emergency waiting room, that will be illustrated. A protected room, with a clear space design, maximizes comprehension and predictability. The multisensory environment is thought to help sensory integration and relaxation. Visual communication through Ipad allows an anticipated understanding of medical procedures, and a specific technological system supports requests, choices and self-determination in order to fit sensory stimulation to personal preferences, especially for hypo and hypersensitive people. All these characteristics should ensure a better regulation of the arousal, less behavior problems, improving treatment accessibility, safety, and effectiveness. First results about patient-satisfaction levels will be presented.

Keywords : accessibility of care, autism-friendly architecture, personalized therapeutic process, sensory environment

Conference Title : ICA 2016 : International Conference on Autism

Conference Location : London, United Kingdom

Conference Dates : September 29-30, 2016